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*P'LL SHOW YOU
THE TOWN*

WITHDRAWN

I'll Show You the Town

BY

ELMER DAVIS

Author of "Times Have Changed"

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KEARNEY, NEBRASKA

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*I'LL SHOW YOU
THE TOWN*

I.

Good-Bye, Girls, I'm Through.

IN the long taxi ride homeward Frances fell asleep, with her head on my shoulder.

I was as tired as she from a night of dancing, but I couldn't go to sleep; I had to sit up stiff and straight to keep her head comfortably settled. So I shivered in the raw wind that blew in through the taxi window, straight from Labrador via Long Island Sound, and looked out at the bright-lit emptiness of upper Broadway: a rattling milk wagon; a taxi cruising for unlikely custom in this world of slumbering apartment houses; a trolley car shooting past deserted corners at subway speed; a policeman, perfunctorily trying locks on the doors of delicatessens, cigar stores, lingerie shops; a rubber-coated street cleaner playing a hose on the glistening asphalt—the night life of New York, shortly before dawn, and some time after prohibition. Even I, at the age of twenty-nine, could remember better and livelier times; I yawned, and wondered if I would hear the alarm clock in the morning.

I had to get up in the morning, for it was commencement day at Columbia University, where I held the honorable, if not very profitable, post of

assistant professor of Latin; and I must put on my doctor's gown and join in the academic procession that gave the graduates their send-off. Frances didn't have to get up; yet with the whole morning before her she still slept on, her face buried in the collar of my coat, as placidly as if I were her husband.

And I wasn't her husband. I was nobody's husband. Jerome Hershfield was her husband, but he worked at night in a morning newspaper office. So I had got into the habit of taking Fan to dances, and she had got into the habit of going to sleep on the way home. There was no special reason why she shouldn't go to sleep; we weren't in love, and we had long ago talked each other out; yet I was beginning to resent the way her head dropped on my shoulder with an accustomed confidence, a certainty that the shoulder would be always there. Whose shoulder was it, anyway?

Well, as I looked back over the evening, I had the feeling that it was everybody's shoulder. Marie Galt had laid her hand on it when she asked me what to give her brother's ex-roommate for a wedding present, explaining that of course she could have asked her brother, but that he wouldn't appreciate the limitations of a self-supporting bachelor girl's budget. Helen Loree had cried a little (on my shoulder) as she told me that she didn't trust her husband's bootlegger, and couldn't I speak to Louis about it. Adelaide Ryker had led me into an alcove to ask me if she ought to marry the honorable and industrious youth who loved her, or the

agreeable young scalawag she loved; and had cried a little (on my shoulder) when I advised her to chuck them both and stick to her job.

Women had always liked me, always trusted me. I had been rather proud of that; proud that girls who used to cry on my shoulder, before they were married, when they were lonesome for other men, would cry on my shoulder after they were married, while they blew off an accumulation of grievances against their husbands. Married or unmarried, they liked to ask my advice, and borrow money from me, and tell me the stories of their lives. No doubt I owed these tokens of confidence partly to a sentimental shyness that preferred to hear the story of a girl's hopeless passion for some other man, rather than try to inspire her with a hopeful passion for me; partly, too, to the well known fact that I didn't make enough money to support a wife. Still I had felt that I understood women. Now I began to suspect that they understood me.

I was young and learned; my colleagues at the university seemed to think I could look forward to a brilliant future; I was a fairly good dancer, a not unwilling spender, a reasonably good talker, and a wonderful listener. Yet as I ran over the dozen or so affectionate friendships with women which had been my chief accomplishment—yes, my career, in so far as I had one—it seemed to me that this respectable list of social qualifications had nothing to do with it at all. For these girls on whom I had wasted time and money for years past, I was nothing but a shoulder.

The taxi bumped around a corner into a silent side street and Frances woke up with a yawn.

"Why, Alec, I've been asleep, haven't I? It was sweet of you to let me snooze along all the way home."

I helped her out and paid the driver—my own apartment was just around the corner. Over Morningside Park and Harlem the morning star burned in the gray blur of dawn.

"Aren't we late?" she said sleepily. "I suppose Jerome's been at home and in bed for an hour."

"He doesn't wait up for you?" I asked. "You ought to appreciate that confidence, Fan."

"I don't know whether he trusts me," she admitted, "but he trusts you. Alec, you didn't mean it, did you? Nobody ever thinks of you in that way."

"Good night," I said grumpily.

From the black depths of the hallway she called back:

"Are you going to the Kappa Chi dance Monday?"

"No," I told her. "I'm not." I knew that meant that she was not, but I didn't care. I was through—through with Fan, through with them all.

Not that I wanted her, or Jerome, or anybody to think of me in that way. After that one, foolish, glorious, desperate boy-and-girl affair with Lucile, back in the little coeducational college that we had both attended seven years ago, I had had enough of romance. Lucile and I were poor and earnest and romantic; we read Browning and Shelley together,

and burned with enthusiasm for the day when we could begin the joint practice of high ideals on a low income. And then I went away to graduate school, and within six months she had married—married Frank Pemberton, who couldn't talk about the True, the Beautiful and the Good in the engaging fashion that I then commanded, but who did something sinfully profitable on the Chicago Board of Trade.

Ah, well. It had been a harder shock than I realized, at the time. I could see now that it would have been a still harder shock if we had ever married and started out on our lofty program; but Lucile had undeniably thought of me in that way. For years after, the recollection of that disaster had made me swerve away from intimacies that seemed likely to be too close for comfort. I had deliberately preferred the association of married women, because for a gentleman of my austere antecedents and respectable inclinations they were safe. And in course of time it grew to be a habit; I, too, had become safe.

Now, at twenty-nine, I began to see that I had spent entirely too much time at dances, at the theater, in what was left of Broadway night life. I was only an assistant professor; I taught, but I didn't write. And only by writing a learned book could I earn my promotion to associate professor. I could have written half a dozen books in the time I had wasted on these women. They had been my career—keeping them amused; cheering them up; giving them advice they could have got elsewhere if I hadn't

been at hand; lending them money they might have got at the bank, and would have repaid if they had got it at the bank. A fine career for Alexander Deupree! For my ancestors had made their careers with their heads, not their shoulders.

II.

A Chip Off the Family Tree.

MY ancestors, however, had also been safe—safe and respectable, on my father's side. My father was the Reverend Doctor John Knox Deupree, president and professor of moral philosophy in Wyndham College, one of those little coeducational institutions that broke out like a rash all over the Middle West when a pious generation settled the wilderness, and have ever since been the scene of a civil war between the church that founded them and the world from which they draw their students and their endowment funds. He entertained a vigorous and inspiring faith in the terrors of a fiery hell, and saw no moral difference between billiards and burglary; he hammered into some thousands of ordinary young men and women the fear of God and the rudiments of understanding; he lived and died poor, and worked himself to death for his college; and he liked it, for it was in the blood.

Ever since Alexandre du Pré, who preferred to change his nationality rather than his religion, migrated from France to Scotland in 1685, we have been like that. The Deuprees, normally, were preachers or professors, or both. An occasional

governor or senator was regarded as something of a black sheep; our real interest lay in such matters as foreordination, the original Adam, and the iota subscript.

But my mother was a Gaylord.

I never heard much about the Gaylords at home; they had lived in Kentucky, and I gathered that they must have been a godless lot. But when I got into college—when I was arrested for malicious destruction of property in connection with a bonfire to celebrate a football victory—when the dean of women caught me kissing Lucile in the dormitory vestibule, on prayer-meeting night—when things like that happened, my father would shake his head and say it was that wild Kentucky blood. Then I came on to graduate school in New York, before prohibition, and the Kentucky blood had more to say for itself. The Deuprees would have disowned me in those later years, if there had been any of them left; yet if it was the Gaylord blood that made me play around with women, it was the Deupree inheritance that made me so deplorably safe. And from either viewpoint my social career had been a failure. No Deupree would have spent so much time with the girls; no Gaylord would have wasted it.

Reflecting on these things I was crossing the campus, homeward bound after commencement the next day, when I met Professor McCabe. I bowed with deference, for this was the McCabe who had written that classic work on "The Ablative Case in Pre-Literary Latin," also the McCabe who pulled the wires that made promotions in the Latin department.

If I wanted to become an associate professor, I must cultivate McCabe.

"Well, Deupree, what do you expect to do with your summer? Mountains—seashore——"

"No," I announced, "I'm going to stay in town and work."

"Break the habit of a lifetime, eh? Going to teach in the summer school?"

"No, I rather thought I'd write a book."

"Ah! For the select few, like Einstein, or the gate receipts, like—well, well, I mustn't blaspheme my colleagues."

"Both," I said boldly. "There's no reason why a scholarly book shouldn't sell, if you bury the scholarship in the footnotes. I'm going to write a study of apartment house life in ancient Rome."

The sardonic look was chased off his face by a vindictive eagerness.

"Have you read what Kentzinger wrote about that in Princeton Classical Studies?"

"Yes, and I think it's bunk."

"Bunk?" he barked. "That's the most favorable comment I've heard yet. Kentzinger has put out the most pitifully inaccurate stuff that was ever foisted on the world in the name of scholarship. I'd meant to write a refutation of him myself, but I'm too busy to write just now. And you're going to do it. First-rate! If you won't mind an occasional suggestion from me——"

I lied, and said I wouldn't. I knew McCabe. He might be too busy to write this book himself, but he wouldn't be too busy to spend most of the summer

telling me how to write it. However, you mustn't look a Greek bearing gifts in the mouth.

"I'm glad to hear it, Deupree," he went on. "You're a good teacher; but I don't mind telling you that some of us have been worrying a little because you don't write. Since the war, work's become fashionable in the university. You may not like it, I may not like it; but it's a fact. If a man doesn't write books in his own field, at least he ought to write novels, or poetry; it's being done. Men have danced themselves to fame, but not in the Latin department . . . Glad to hear it. If you do as well as I expect—well, you know Forderly's retiring next year."

Forderly was a full professor; my ambition didn't look so high.

"No reason why a competent man shouldn't jump a grade," said McCabe. "If you put Kentzinger in his place—simply blot him off the map of scholarship—I shouldn't be surprised if the powers that be would feel you deserve a professorship. Of course, that's only a guess. Who am I to read the future?" (Who was he, indeed, but the brother-in-law of the chairman of the Board of Trustees?) "But with a good sound book to your credit, we might expect——"

That was the way we left it. I might expect—if I wrote a book that satisfied McCabe. Not so easy as it sounded, particularly as I'd done next to no work as yet. I'd merely thought of writing a book. Now I'd have to write it; McCabe had made that plain. I must get on or get off. I must pro-

duce this work of scholarship, this summer, under the eye, and the hand, of McCabe. It meant three months of grinding work; and as I crossed Amsterdam Avenue and rode up to my eleventh-floor apartment overlooking the campus, I felt an awful distaste for work. That Kentucky blood was rising again.

Two rooms, kitchenette, and bath, that was my home; but it had a view of the bluffs beyond the river, and was only twenty minutes by subway from the bright white lights; cool and windswept, and far from the worst place in the world to spend the summer. Now that the Labrador wind had shifted, it was a particularly pleasant June. I should have to spend the summer reading frantically in the university library, writing frantically in the apartment. No trips to the beaches, no week-ends in the country, no holiday in the hills . . . But what of that? Hadn't I just renounced all the women with whom I might have fought the surf at Long Beach, whose husbands might have invited me out for week-ends?

And if I became a full professor at thirty, I'd make six thousand a year instead of three thousand, and be renowned among men, and especially among professors, to the everlasting glory of the Deuprees. It was a wonderful chance, the chance of a lifetime. My career was made, barring the trifle of three months' work. I spent the afternoon thinking about that, and on the strength of the prospect bought myself an unreasonably expensive dinner at the Claremont, and smoked an unreasonably expensive cigar as I walked home. As I shut the door

of the little apartment, I could hear the iron gates of respectability clanging behind me. I was about to become a professor, a celebrated scholar, who wouldn't have time to let girls tell him the story of their lives, and couldn't afford to be seen in a Broadway night club that knew not Volstead.

Well, it was what I wanted; what my ancestry required; what I had sworn, a few hours ago, was the duty of a Deupree. Nobody but an idiot, of Gaylord ancestry, would have qualms about turning from unprofitable women to the business of life.

I stooped, and picked up the mail that had been thrust under the door.

III.

First Aid to Mephistopheles.

IT was about like any other evening's mail: a bill for the quarter's dues at the Faculty Club; three or four circulars from text-book publishers; appeals for starving Russia, starving Armenia, starving India, starving Germany; a piteous appeal for one dollar, from a society whose purpose was to get radicals out of jail; a stern and peremptory appeal for one dollar, from a society whose purpose was to put radicals in jail; an invitation to a private view of somebody's paintings; an invitation to some conference or other, up in Westchester; and a note from my cousin Edith Torrey.

Indirectly, Edith was responsible for a good deal of the postal matter that I threw into the waste basket. She had put me on the mailing list of two or three art galleries, and half-a-dozen charities. Which amused me; for Edith, alone among all the Deuprees of history, had Married Money. Her secretary's salary was as big as mine, and she knew it; but she would have felt disloyal to the family if she hadn't given me an opportunity to contribute five dollars to every good cause that had nicked her for ten thousand. Being a Deupree was a life work for

anybody; but to Edith it took on the color of a religious vocation.

She had written:

DEAR ALEC—

Now that the strain of the academic year is over, Harmon and I hope to see you a little more frequently. We're going to Lenox in August, as usual, and I do hope that you can spend the month with us. I know you have so often spoken of your desire to do some literary work of a serious character; and if you'd let us make you comfortable, give you a quiet place where you could be well cared for, and could write and study without interruption, I'd feel that I had contributed my part toward upholding the tradition of the family.

Affectionately—

EDITH.

It sounded well, if you didn't know Edith. I had gone with them to Lenox, once. Writing, studying, or existing without interruption, when Edith was around, was an idle dream. If I had to take orders this summer, I'd rather take them from McCabe.

There were no classical libraries at Lenox; that would serve as an alibi. What was this other note?

DR. LIONEL GUSHMORE

*Secretary of the National Conference on the
Segregation of the Socially Inefficient
invites*

DR. ALEXANDER DEUPREE

*to address the conference on the night of
Monday, June 18,
on the subject of*

COLLEGES AND THE MENTALLY UNFIT

There was more on the other side, but that was enough. When I was a full professor, that sort of thing might be compulsory; but not yet. I tossed it on the table beside Edith's note, and frowned at my book shelves. Time to start work. I couldn't do much to-night, of course; but I could make a beginning——

I was still wondering where to make the beginning when the doorbell rang, and I started up in relief. It was Billy Bonner, who sold automobiles, and lived in the apartment across the hall. His round, pink face, haloed in blue cigar smoke, was a glad sight to a young scholar who otherwise would have had to go to work. I liked Bonner anyway, but to-night he was providential.

"How's the owl?" he inquired cheerfully. "Don't tell me you're gettin' ready to think some more, now that the think factory has shut down for the summer."

"What else can I do?" I demanded glumly. "I can't handle a selling talk; nobody left me money; I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I have to think. I'm going to write a book."

"What else can you do?" he repeated, easing himself down on the couch with the caution of one who knew my furniture. "Say, you haven't seen our midyear model, have you? Doc, the Sagamore 1923 Midyear is the biggest, brightest, best and fastest article that was ever offered to the public at nine thousand dollars F.O.B. Detroit——"

"You know," I interrupted, "that I make three thousand a year. Why make me thirsty?"

“Because I’ve got one, you fish; and if you wasn’t so shy we’d dig up a couple of little fluffs and run out somewhere in the country to cool off. No? I know you can dance, and I’ve seen you drink liquor. And think of the ladies, doc. Why not throw a ray of sunshine into their poor little lives?”

“I’m off women,” I announced. “I’m going to write a book.”

“My first wife wrote a book,” said Bonner moodily. “‘A Soul Betrayed,’ she called it. It was about me—nasty, mean thing. Don’t think it ever sold much, but she certainly got her money’s worth out of one gift copy. I was goin’ to sue her for libel, but my lawyer said, Don’t you do it. So far, he says to me, nobody knows what’s in that book but you and her and the printer. Do you want to tell the town? . . . Oh, he was right, of course. That was after she divorced me the second time. First time she didn’t mind so much, but twice made her mad. And when my second wife come to file her suit, damn if it didn’t turn out she’d got a copy of this book some place. Oh, they were a mean pair, I tell you; and now I’m livin’ in this hole in the wall, instead of the Biltmore, so I can afford alimony for both. Life would be so simple, doc, without the fair sex——”

“So I’ve decided.”

“And yet we can’t get along without ’em. Suppose we run down to Long Beach Sunday. I’ll call up——”

“Get thee behind me, Mephistopheles,” I said wearily. “You’ll have to find another Faust. I

told you I was going to write a book; no time for foolishness."

"Where are you going to write this book?"

"Here."

"Here? What about your gang—the Hershfields, and that mob? Will they let you work?"

"I'm off my gang."

Bonner absorbed this news, and then blew it out of the window, dissolved in a cloud of cigar smoke.

"Even if you are," he observed, "this collegiate hilltop is no place to work. Not for you. Not in the summer. Next month, doc, twenty thousand women schoolteachers will come here for summer school, and they all know you. Yes, they do; I've seen 'em in years past. Every one of 'em comes from your college, or your home town; and you have to take 'em all to see the Stock Exchange and the Woolworth Building——"

"What can I do?" I protested. "I'm about the only man from Wyndhamville in New York. Everybody that ever went to the college knows me because father was president. And they think it's as easy for me to show them the town, here, as it would be for them to show me the town in Flat Rock or Tanglewood Corners. Of course they all drop on me . . . But not this year. This book is going to make my future. The woman doesn't live that could get me away from it."

My eyes followed Bonner's to the only woman's photograph in the room—a snapshot in a silver frame, on the typewriter desk; and my eyes lingered after his went back to the litter of papers on

the table. Yes, Lucile lived; but she lived with Frank Pemberton . . .

Seven years ago. She smiled out of the photograph, a girl in a middy blouse, with bobbed hair; a picnic snapshot from an age when everything was a picnic. Bobbed hair was a novelty in those days, and it was only a way of wearing the hair; it hadn't become a moral issue. Even this faded picture showed Lucile's lithe slimness; she went without corsets in a simpler age, when that was a rare and praiseworthy habit, approved by all on hygienic grounds—before the preachers had discovered it was a sin. The world was young, then; the virtuous had not yet gone in for quantity production of the knowledge of good and evil, and an aggressive sales campaign to force it on the most reluctant customer . . .

But Bonner had picked something off the table—

“What's the segregation of the socially inefficient?” he demanded.

“Heaven knows,” I said listlessly. “Some worthy cause, no doubt; but I'm not going.”

Bonner was reading with a grin.

“So they want you to come and make 'em a speech, eh, Doc? ‘Unless the invitation is declined in writing, acceptance is presumed.’ This Gushmore presumes a lot. Who is he?”

“I don't know. I've heard the name, but I can't place it. Let him presume what he likes; I'm not going.”

Bonner read on with signs of interest.

“Did you read the rest of this, doc?”

"The first page was enough."

"Oh, no. Never turn down a contract that you haven't read. Listen to this. 'Speakers and delegates, it is hoped, will be able to remain during all the sessions of the conference, which will be held at Maplecrest Inn, Westchester County, New York, June 15 to 22, inclusive.' Ever been to Maplecrest?"

"Never heard of it."

"You wouldn't, on your salary. One of these big country club hotels, with a golf course and tennis courts, and an indoor swimming pool; a dance floor that's a dream and an orchestra fresh from Jazzville; and the bootlegging is all handled by one of the assistant managers—none of this unreliable stuff you get from bellboys. Oh, birdie! I'd go to that conference."

"My book——" I began feebly, for poor, frail human nature was buckling and bending double under the strain. A week at a place like that would be the one bright spot in a dark and laborious summer. But——

"Besides," I said, "I can't afford it."

"The best is yet to come," said Bonner. "Get this. 'By arrangement, all expenses of speakers and delegates will be defrayed by the conference.' And believe onewho has been there, that means that somebody has put up three or four hundred dollars per speaker and delegate. No wonder acceptance is presumed. Who would break Santa Claus's heart?"

"If somebody is defraying expenses," I protested, "somebody expects to get something out of it."

But this was an evasion, a last-ditch defense of the Deupree conscience. Philanthropists who financed learned gatherings, from pure altruism, were not unknown; and the fact that I didn't know Gushmore, or the socially inefficient, was no reason why I shouldn't go. We professors are badly paid, as everybody knows; it's a part of the academic tradition that we don't refuse daintily disguised handouts, in a worthy cause.

My soul was on its back, fighting to keep the fingers of temptation away from its throat. The conference would delay the beginning of my book; but I could think up some excuse for McCabe, and after a week on the tennis courts, and in the swimming pool, how much better I could write . . .

The Deupree conscience knew that all this was the voice of the Tempter; but the Tempter whispered that the Deupree conscience was opposed to my going to Maplecrest only because I might get some fun out of it. And while I was thinking it over, there came what my pious ancestors would have called a Sign. The hall boy appeared at the door, with a telegram from the scholarly clergyman who had been president of Wyndham College since my father's death.

Immensely relieved to learn that you are to speak at Maplecrest. Great opportunity before you. Meet me Hotel Commodore three-thirty to-morrow and learn all. Greatest urgency. Fate of our college depends on you.

A. JUDSON GOODHUE.

I tossed it to Bonner.

"My acceptance seems to have been presumed in a hurry," I observed, "if the news has reached the Middle West. I don't know what all this means; but I'll have to go and find out."

"Go to Maplecrest?"

"It's for the college," I explained. "My grandfather founded it. My father was president for thirty years. But I never did anything for it, except graduate and get out. I don't know what this is, but if it has Goodhue worried it's pretty bad. And if there's anything I can do for the college, I'll have to do it."

"And do it at Maplecrest," Bonner added, "with all expenses defrayed. You Fausts lead a hard life."

IV.

Devolution of Edith's Duty.

SO that was settled; and since it was obviously impossible to get a real start on my book before the conference, I decided to begin the summer right by sleeping till noon the next day. But the hope was vain, thanks to the miracles of modern invention.

Science, even the simplest science, has always been too deep for me. Why, when I can never get anything on the telephone but wrong numbers, or the cold information that our university has had its phone discontinued, or that Jerome Hershfield's newspaper, with its dozens of trunks and its battalion of operators always on duty, doesn't answer—why does that extraordinary instrument function perfectly whenever anybody tries to get me, especially in the morning?

At eight o'clock the telephone bell woke me. For a few minutes I lay in bed, trying to compute the statistical probability that I was somebody's wrong number; but the bell rang on with the implacability of a Chinese torture, so I had to answer it. It was the right number, and McCabe was on the other end of the wire.

But that was all right. Before I could invent an apology for postponing the plunge into my career, I heard him explaining that he had to go down to Philadelphia for a few days, and would advise me to put off beginning my book till he came back and talked over the method with me. He knew how I'd chafe at the delay, but I'd find something to do . . .

Admitting that, I crawled back into bed, providentially freed from immediate worry . . . The telephone again; Frances this time, telling me that her sister was coming up from New Orleans next week, and that I must meet her——

"I've made my plans for the summer," I said coldly. "Work—merely this and nothing more."

"But, Alec! You'll have time to come in for dinner and a game of bridge, won't you? I know you'll like Rachel, and she's the sort of woman that doesn't interfere with a man's work——"

"There is no such woman," I interrupted. That Kentucky blood prompted me to add incautiously: "And even if it were true, it's not much of a recommendation."

"Oh!" said Fan in a tone which might mean anything, and hung up. Wondering if I could get back to sleep, I pulled the covers over me again.

It must have been just about that moment that my cousin Edith told her maid to call me. And did any one tell that maid that I was discontinued, or out of order, or that I didn't answer? No. She got me in an instant; and I was out of bed, waked for good this time, swearing savagely under my breath as I heard her——

"Dr. Deupree? Just a moment, please. Mrs. Torrey would like to speak to you."

Nobody had ever accused Edith of being the sort of woman who didn't interfere with a man's work; and though her husband managed to keep her within bounds, it merely meant that she lavished her surplus of autocracy on me. This morning she was excited, and it seemed only polite to pretend that I was excited, too.

"Our plans have been changed rather suddenly," she explained. "It's most upsetting. Harmen has to go to China to look after some mining investments. We're sailing in two or three weeks . . . Oh, of course I'm going with him . . . No, I don't pretend that I like the prospect, and it interferes with my arrangements terribly, but my place is with him. Can't you come down for lunch? I want to talk things over with you."

That meant, of course, that she would talk things over at me. I interposed some weak objections, but Edith brushed them away.

"No, this is really quite important, Alec. There were things I had planned to do, duties that I can't escape; and——"

Well, the substance of it was that she was going to escape them anyway, and I wasn't. It happened that I was the only man left in the family, which ought to have given me some prestige; but Edith was ten years older, and had got in the habit of giving me orders when we were children. However, I reflected as I dressed, there weren't many of her duties that she could leave to me, and she might al-

ways be stricken with unprecedented generosity, and leave me her car and her chauffeur, too. At any rate, she was going away for the summer; that helped.

She came near reversing herself, at that, when she heard about my book. It appeared that she had been worrying almost as much as McCabe about my unproductive indolence, and the news that at last I was going to live up to the family traditions and produce an original contribution to human knowledge quite upset her. Of course her place was with Harmon, but for a few minutes she was in danger of feeling that her place was with me, too, creating an atmosphere of quiet so that I could think and write. I finally persuaded her that Harmon was her first duty.

"But I must leave so much undone," she lamented. "Sometimes I wonder if I haven't too many interests, and yet when I go over the list it doesn't seem that anybody else could be trusted with any of them. But you'll have to be trusted with this one, Alec. A little friend of mine has just come to town—Hazel Deming. Have I told you about her?"

More women!

"No, and you don't need to tell me about her. I'm going to be too busy to entertain girls this summer."

"I didn't mean entertainment exactly," said Edith gloomily. "It's a case for—— Oh, I wish you were married, Alec."

It seemed best to let her know that our wishes differed.

"You needn't think you can marry me off to this Hazel What's-Her-Name——"

"No! Good Heavens! Whatever made you think—— Anything but that! No! . . . But if you were married to some sober, steady woman——"

"Edith," I said bitterly, "your ideas of recreation aren't mine. You'd probably turn up your nose at my friends. (And vice versa.) But, as between Deuprees, I may tell you that if I ever marry, I have no particular intention of marrying a drunken unsteady woman——"

"You never know what you're getting nowadays. Even the best of them—— But don't be foolish. I meant some woman of mature years and social standing. But then, you're mature beyond your years——"

"What's this all about?" I demanded. "Why does this Hazel need mature women? Above all, why does she need me?"

"She's a problem," said Edith gloomily. "Her father was a partner of Harmon's in some California oil enterprises. A—a somewhat uncouth man, but of very fine character. I never knew Hazel's mother—she's been dead for years. And her father died just as the oil properties were beginning to pay. It was most unfortunate.

"Well, this summer the child suddenly decided to come East. Because Harmon and I were the only people she knew in New York, she wrote us that she was coming; and we felt it was our duty to take her into our home and try to fill the place of her parents . . . But we have to go to China."

"I'm not her parents," I said, "nor do I see how I could pinch-hit for them. Is she here—in the house?"

"She's in town, but she wouldn't stay with us. Imagine that, Alec. She was polite about it, but really—— No, she isn't ungrateful; she's just an ignorant child, that's it; only nineteen. She went to a hotel. Said she didn't want to be in our way, as if we lived in a two-room log cabin. What she meant, of course, was that she didn't want us to be in her way. Oh, I'm afraid, Alec! These young people! This younger generation!"

"A fast little flapper, eh?"

"Not at all. Nothing like that. Quite a sweet little thing. But so helpless—so ignorant—and so confident in her ignorance. I simply can't leave her alone in town all summer."

"Perhaps when she finds you and Harmon are leaving she'll go back to California."

"Back to California? They never go back. You might as well expect a Zionist to go back to Zion."

"Well," I mused, "if you and Harmon are going to be gone for only a few months, you can lend her money to live on till you come back, or she finds a job. You won't miss it."

"She doesn't need that. She's nineteen—she came into her father's property last year."

"Much of it?" I asked absently.

"Quite a good deal. Let me see. When the estate was appraised it was about twelve million dollars, but the oil fields are doing so well that she must be worth twenty million by now."

"Twenty million dollars!" I gasped. "Twenty million dollars and a nineteen-year-old girl! What could I do with that?"

"Somebody will have to do something," she sighed. "Hazel's never had any advantages. Lived most of her life in oil towns, and places like that. Just lately she's been at school somewhere in California, but of course she's terribly immature and terribly rich. Can't you imagine her alone in New York, with all its temptations—and with money enough to attract fortune hunters and criminals and Heaven knows what?"

"All alone?"

"She might better be. She has a woman with her—quite a common woman, who kept some sort of boarding-house where the Demings lived before they had any money. No, not a maid—she doesn't know she needs a maid. She doesn't know anything—and living in this perfectly impossible way——"

"What way?"

"At the Plaza," said Edith helplessly. "She leased eighteen rooms and twelve baths. Said she wanted to have room to turn around. Eighteen rooms and twelve baths, for her and this woman. Can you imagine it?"

I could. It was exactly the gesture of grandeur that I'd have made if anybody had dumped twenty million in my lap when I was nineteen. And there was always the consoling thought that when Hazel was bored she could kill time by bathing in her twelve bathrooms instead of going out to attract criminals and fortune hunters.

“Why don’t you turn her over to some woman you know?”

“But they’ve all gone to Europe, or are going out of town. Oh, I could get her invitations to Southampton and Lenox; but she won’t take them. She’s a stubborn little thing, Alec. She’s never been east of Salt Lake City before, and she says that the first thing is to see New York. I’ve told her nobody stays here in summer; but she wants to see the town.”

“Wise girl,” I said. “But let her see it with somebody else.”

“But, Alec!” The same words, the same tone, Fan had used this morning. They tinkled in my memory back along the years, a whole procession of half-forgotten women crying “But, Alec!” and eventually getting me to do their work for them. “But, Alec, somebody must help her! Somebody must get rid of this awful woman and hire her a staff of competent servants; somebody must find her a suitable place to live——”

“I’ve never had money enough to play with your set,” I reminded her. “I don’t know where you find servants; and if I did, why should she take orders from me? No, Edith.”

“I’ll tell you what to do, and how to do it. And she’ll take orders; I’ve told her all about you, how brilliant you are, and everything. And then she wants to see things——”

“If you expect her to join your set, eventually, I can’t show her anything that she’ll want to see. All I know is Greenwich Village and Broadway.”

"Oh, that's just as well," said Edith with shaking head. "This country club life, Alec! Since prohibition, Broadway is the safest place there is. And she'll find Broadway and the Village—no doubt of that. A girl overloaded with money, who's never seen anything—she'll rush for the bright lights. With nobody to guide her, the least she's likely to do is to make some terrible mistake that will get into the papers and ruin her chances of ever knowing anybody. Alec, you know the Younger Generation! She's never known anybody; she has no standards. Some fortune hunter might gain an ascendancy over her, and I'd never forgive myself."

"So," I observed gloomily, "you want to fix it so that if anything happens you can never forgive me. Do you think I mean to spend my summer tugging at her leash? No. What could I——"

"Why, Alec, you might save her." It was clear to Edith that anybody must be willing to drop his own most urgent business, if offered the chance to save some reluctant flounderer. "She'll certainly drift into this wild life, Alec, if she's left to herself. But with a companion who is young enough and personable enough to be agreeable, yet who at the same time is entirely trustworthy; who can amuse her, yet guide her with the restraining hand, and keep her thoughts from wandering to foolish romance——"

"In short," I said, "somebody of whom nobody ever thinks in that way. No, Edith. I've just severed relations with all women, in order to go to work. Shall I take on the responsibility for the

daughter of the oil wells, and her twenty millions? Shall I spend my summer pursuing this reckless person through cafés, to keep her from marrying a cake eater? No. If you can't find a woman to take her over, give her to a trust company. Not me. Let an ascendancy be gained over her, if she feels that way. I'm no bodyguard, no duenna, no receiver in moral bankruptcy. No."

"Now, Alec, she isn't like that at all. You must——"

"I have an important engagement at the Commodore in fifteen minutes," I said firmly. "Where's my hat?"

"But, Alec, she's so helpless——"

"I'm not a partner in her oil wells. Her father was no friend of mine."

Edith threw up her hands.

"Very well. But you must understand this isn't settled."

I shook my head, but as I left her I had a cold conviction that she was telling the truth. It was one of our family principles that nothing was ever settled till it was settled right; it was another, that Edith was always right.

V.

Perils of the Erwe Lamb.

THE information clerk at the Commodore told me that the Rev. Dr. A. Judson Goodhue was in Room 1523, and I went up with eagerness. I liked the old man, and he liked me, though I'd given him a good deal of trouble when he was dean of the college, and I a riotous student who didn't set the moral example that might have been expected of the president's son. Now that I was in his line of business he treated me as an equal, and after my plunge into Edith's feminine preoccupations, I felt that it would be a relief to talk shop.

I found him seated at the window, the gold-bowed spectacles resting insecurely on the end of his nose, and a Greek Testament lying open in his lap. But spectacles and Testament tumbled to the floor together, when he started up at sight of me and pumped my hand.

"Thank Heaven, Alec! Just in time . . . Sit down. You're looking well."

He wasn't. The thin, scholarly face was drawn with worry—worry over the souls of his students and the salaries of his professors. I knew the look; that sort of worry had killed my father.

"What can I do for you?" I asked.

"Alec, the college is in trouble. Serious trouble."

"Moral, or financial?"

"Not moral. Oh, not moral. In that respect, I flatter myself, we're doing very well. I—ah—do not share the prevalent excitement about the Younger Generation. I've seen previous generations. Of course, we have our flurries at Wyndham. Our young people dance, despite the rule against it——"

"But," I interrupted, "they did that when I was a student, ten years ago."

"Exactly. And when I was a student, forty years ago. No. Moral problems we have always with us. But money has wings."

So it was real trouble.

"I suppose you know," he went on, "that we're starting a new campaign for funds in the fall."

"No, I didn't know it. You had a campaign, just after the war. I thought it was successful——"

"Certainly it was successful, but I don't need to tell your father's son that no college ever had enough money. The plant is still inadequate; old buildings, old equipment——"

"But didn't you raise a building fund in 1919?"

"We had to put it all into the stadium," he confessed. "Yes, yes; I know we needed other things worse. But everybody was building stadiums, and we couldn't afford to fall behind. The younger alumni demanded the stadium; and the younger alumni have the enthusiasm."

"And now?"

"Well, we still need a new chapel, and a new library. The older alumni are demanding them; and

the older alumni have the money. We can't afford to chill either group."

"You ought to make some of those old profiteers come across for a chapel," I observed. "And a library, too."

"We have the chapel assured, and a beginning on the library. But of course, when you once start a thing like this, you can't be moderate. The women's dormitory is quite outgrown; somebody must give us a new one. The memorial gateway in honor of Broadus Wheelock of the class of '84 still stands half finished, as we left it when the war began. With all the fraternities putting up fifty-thousand-dollar houses, we can't afford to have the college buildings mistaken for chapter-house garages.

"And of course we'll need a bigger endowment to carry the overhead on the new buildings, as well as to raise salaries; quite a lot of money. Well, I thought we had most of it in sight—till lately. Now I'm not so sure. And the worst of it is the campaign is started; we can't stop . . . So I've come to you for help."

"Why to me? You know my salary."

"Not financial help," said Goodhue, with a trace of embarrassment. "Something a little more diplomatic—more delicate—and more difficult."

"Whatever it is," I told him, "I'll do my best. Wyndham College is part of the religion of the Deuprees; what can I do?"

"I was rather surprised, Alec, to find that you're going to speak at the Conference on the Segregation of the Socially Inefficient."

"So was I."

"I suppose you know Gushmore?"

"No."

"Neither do I," said Goodhue, "but I've seen him. He's a professional uplifter and benefactor. Uplifter of others, benefactor of himself, chiefly. A big, handsome fellow, with a fine mop of iron-gray hair, eye-glasses on a black ribbon—very effective with the ladies . . . Do you know anything about the segregation of the socially inefficient?"

"I don't even know what it is," I confessed. "But—oh, well, you've known me from the cradle, Dr. Goodhue, and you're human. It promises a week's outing, at the sort of country hotel I could never afford—with all expenses paid."

He nodded.

"So I understand. The entire hotel has been leased for the week by a benevolent old lady from Arlington, Massachusetts. I suppose she knows no more about the segregation of the socially inefficient than you do; but she knows Gushmore, and Gushmore has induced her to—ah—pay the freight.

"Now, about this conference. I've taken the trouble to make some inquiries. The purpose is high, but rather vague. I've looked over the list of speakers. They struck me, on the whole, as a rather moth-eaten lot. Something wrong with all of them, except a few young fellows like yourself, Alec—young scholars of good reputation and modest income, who presumably knew and cared to know nothing about the conference except that it was going

to be held at a country club hotel, with all expenses paid."

"Then I'd better not go."

"Oh, not at all. You must go. Oh, yes, indeed. For Mrs. Clevenger is going to be there."

"Mrs. Clevenger?" I asked. "Who—— Why, you don't mean old Zaccheus's widow?"

"The same. Mrs. Agnes Clevenger: the principal benefactress of our college."

"Good Heavens!" I muttered. "Agnes Clevenger! I thought she was dead. She must be pretty old, isn't she?"

"Old? She's only thirty-two."

When I had counted up on my fingers, I realized that that was possible. Agnes, as I remembered her, was the sort that is born middle-aged; but maybe that was only the effect of her husband. And after all she had been only eighteen when Zaccheus married her.

Agnes Clevenger had been one of my father's great achievements, the more welcome since she made up for some vain hopes that had been placed in her husband. Back among my earliest memories were the melancholy impressions of Zaccheus's occasional visits in our home. He was a bachelor, wealthy and devout and stingy, who owned a stove factory in Indianapolis, and had been put on the college board of trustees in the hope that he might some day be moved to squander a nickel on Christian education. Father devoted a good deal of thought to the problem of getting money out of Zaccheus, and just as he thought the college could count on a legacy

at least, the old rascal married—married at the age of sixty-nine, married Agnes, the star pupil in his Bible class. Our college was as gloomy that night as if we'd lost a football game.

However, Providence took care of the righteous. When Zaccheus presently died, childless, he left his wife with three or four million dollars that she didn't know how to spend. Agnes was a young woman of antique tastes and earnest disposition, and she had a ready ear for my father's observations on Christian stewardship. It soon appeared that her chief delight was in making a Bedford limestone building grow where only a blade of grass or a pile of tin cans had grown before; all over the Middle West, Agnes was on hand when a rescue home or a Y. W. C. A. building was needed. But Wyndham College was her pet extravagance. She'd given us a hundred thousand for the endowment, and built the Zaccheus Clevenger Memorial Dining Hall; and father had even persuaded her to endow a dozen scholarships for "young men of high moral character with an inclination toward the ministry or social service," which had been very useful in the annual competition for high school football stars.

"I thought she'd given it all away by this time," I said. "What with the war drives——"

"She contributed bountifully," said Goodhue. "Bountifully. But you remember the Scripture story of the widow's cruse—there was always a little oil left. It seems that her husband owned some worthless farm land in Texas—thousands of acres. They found oil all through it, a few years ago.

Then, during the war, the stove factory made helmets. I am informed that they are, or were, more profitable than stoves. Oh, yes; Mrs. Clevenger must be worth seven or eight million, at least. We'd counted on her for half a million on the endowment fund, and perhaps the dormitory and the memorial gateway as well . . . But she's going to the conference."

"You think the conference is out for money?"

"She had a personal invitation from Gushmore. It appears that he became acquainted with her through persons who had obtained funds from her, to relieve a famine somewhere. Got her name off a sucker list, as they say in the business world. I—I thought it only prudent, as a friend of Mrs. Clevenger, to look up his record. I won't bore you with it; but I may say that since he left the ministry, some years ago, his life appears to have been spent in the praiseworthy endeavor to make a permanent connection with some solid bank account. His activities have ranged all the way from Soviet Russia to the Anti-Saloon League, but he never quite caught on. Somebody was always there before him. So now he's got up this conference.

"Mrs. Clevenger is an honorary delegate. There are to be, it seems, mere delegates and honorary delegates. The honorary delegates are the sheep, if I may say so—persons of considerable wealth, and benevolent inclinations. The mere delegates are—ah—wolves in sheep's clothing. In short, Gushmores. He is the chief, but there are others; it seems to be felt that there will be mutton enough

for all. Just what his plan is I don't know. I have heard some talk of the organization of a permanent association for the segregation of the socially inefficient, with a payroll, and overhead, and expense accounts, and so on. The old lady from Massachusetts hasn't provided for that. Yes . . . persons of benevolent inclinations. In the circumstances, Alec, I must say that the college regards Mrs. Clevenger's connection with the conference with some apprehension. For Wyndham is a small college. Our rivals have their fat flocks of rich supporters, but Mrs. Clevenger is our one ewe lamb."

"Didn't you tell her about Gushmore?"

"You haven't seen her for some years," he sighed. "It becomes increasingly difficult, Alec, to tell Mrs. Clevenger anything. She is a woman of somewhat firm opinions, of confidence in her own judgment. And not very critical. Her enthusiasm for the—ah—somewhat undefined purposes of this gathering seems to have extended to its promoters. Gushmore made a great impression on her. He's a handsome fellow, Alec. Very effective with the ladies. And she is so loyal to her friends, and to her own opinions, that I soon found it would be in the highest degree unwise to shake her faith. She is a noble and high-minded woman, of generous impulses. It would grieve me very much if she met some persons whose ideals are not so high as they should be; persons through whom she might have some experience that would blunt her splendid generosity. Yes. It would grieve us all very much if that should happen."

"Then why don't you go to Maplecrest, and keep an eye on her?"

"I'm not invited. I think it is not too much to say that each invitation was sent with a purpose; and since Mrs. Clevenger is known as a friend of Wyndham College, nobody else who was known to be connected with the college could get in. Evidently Gushmore didn't stop to look you up; we ought to be thankful for that.

"Besides, even if I could go—it would be unwise. It might seem as if I were keeping Mrs. Clevenger under surveillance; and that consecrated woman, whom I respect no less for her intellectual than for her moral qualities, might well take offense at the implication that she could not—ah—be trusted out of my sight with her own money. No. That wouldn't do at all. But you, Alec——"

"What about me?" I muttered, not very enthusiastically; for I remembered Agnes.

"You will be there. You will be a speaker—an honored figure. You know her——"

"I used to know her. I haven't seen her for years."

"Still, you know her. And you're a Deupree."

"I certainly am," I groaned. For though I might refuse Edith, I couldn't refuse to help the college.

"But you don't seriously mean to tell me," I said, "that you think these people will make much of a hole in Mrs. Clevenger's millions?"

"Ordinarily, no. But there is one thing I'm afraid of. Mrs. Clevenger is only thirty-two. She

is still in possession of such charms as Providence gave her. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that she might marry again. And Gushmore seems to attract her—Oh, it hasn't gone far; perhaps it hasn't even begun. But Mrs. Clevenger is not a woman of the world. Some designing person—some Gushmore—might take advantage of her inexperience to lure her into a most unfortunate alliance. If by any mischance she should do anything like that, we may be sure that future benefactions would not be dispensed outside of the family."

"Everybody seems to think I'm an antidote to fortune hunters," I remarked bitterly. "Do you want me to marry her?"

"No! Good Heavens!" The old man was genuinely scandalized. "Whatever made you think of that?"

"It seems I'll have to do something to save her from Gushmore."

"Not that. No. What I had in mind, Alec—and I speak as one who knows Mrs. Clevenger a good deal better than she knows herself—is this: the best way to protect her against some such unfortunate misstep as I have suggested is to insure her the constant companionship of some one of her own age—some one who could satisfy her natural craving for society and entertainment, and yet who is perfectly—ah—safe, if you understand me."

"I understand you perfectly," I assured him. The son of Julia Gaylord would have walked out on him at that moment; but the son of John Knox Deupree had to stand by the college.

"I knew you'd see how it is," said Goodhue. "And there's no time to be lost. Mrs. Clevenger is now at Asbury Park. She's coming to New York on Monday. She's never been here before, and she wants somebody to show her the town.

"I must tell you, Alec, that I have had some reason of late to think that Mrs. Clevenger is becoming dissatisfied with the good works that have so far filled her life. She seems to feel that she has outgrown Indianapolis; that perhaps New York offers a wider field of usefulness. With that idea in mind, she wants to see the town and find out just what it has to offer. A great mistake, in my opinion; but she's been flattered."

"I'm no authority on good works," I said, "or the need of them. If that's what she wants to see——"

Goodhue polished his spectacles, set them back on his nose, and looked at me keenly.

"That isn't all," he said after a pause. "I have noticed what I judged to be the stirrings of a desire to see the world; to—to branch out, as it were. And if she's going to do that, it would be well to have a friendly hand near by to steady her. I'm an old man, Alec; I have known other women like Mrs. Clevenger; and it has been my observation that when that kind once gets started, it travels fast."

This was a possibility I hadn't considered.

"You think I'd have to hurry to keep up with Agnes," I laughed. "Not if I know her."

"Oh, no, no, no. Not to keep up with her, but to

guide her. For you must understand, Alec, that while Mrs. Clevenger is going to see New York, New York is also going to see Mrs. Clevenger. Unless we inlanders are misinformed about your city, it can always see eight million dollars coming, and—ah—turn out the reception committee. That is what you must prevent. Keep her out of mischief; keep her away from Gushmore. It won't be so hard; for I know that when people from Wyndhamville come to New York, you show them the town. Do so for Mrs. Clevenger. What that phrase implies I do not know——”

“For people from Wyndhamville,” I explained, “it usually means the Statue of Liberty, the Aquarium, Trinity Churchyard, the Woolworth Building, the Museums, Grant's Tomb, a ride on the Riverside bus, a Greenwich Village tea room——”

I couldn't put much enthusiasm into it, as I thought of going the rounds with Agnes; but Goodhue seemed satisfied.

“A very well balanced program; I am sure it will interest Mrs. Clevenger. Now if you'll come down to Asbury Park on Sunday, to renew your acquaintance——”

“Why do I have to do that?” I was reconciled to the sacrifice; but not so promptly. I needed time to steel myself.

“Because you and I have an appointment with her,” said Goodhue grimly. “I had to make it, to forestall Gushmore. I had to sound your praises, to excite her interest. She remembered you vaguely,

but she knows all about you now. If you don't go, she'll never forgive you—or me. And then somebody else will have to provide the women's dormitory, the memorial gateway, and half a million for the endowment fund."

VI.

Pygmalion and the Marble Block.

I ARRIVED at Agnes's hotel in Asbury Park late Sunday afternoon, to find that Goodhue had taken her off to a vesper service. There was nothing to do but leave my bag in my room, come down to the veranda, and wait for them. The Sunday newspaper had to be left in my room, too; it was an affront to Mrs. Clevenger's well-known principles, and I couldn't afford to be seen with it. I didn't dare to smoke, for she and Goodhue might reappear at any moment. I sat on the veranda, looking out over the boardwalk and the beach, and back over my lost youth.

For it was lost—no doubt of that. If I saved the Clevenger fortune for the college, Goodhue would make me an honorary Doctor of Literature next commencement. The excuse, of course, would have to be this learned book I was going to write, or something like it; but in fact the son of John Knox Deupree, the grandson of Athanasius Deupree, would get his Litt. D. for having escorted Agnes through the Bronx Zoo and the Museum of Natural History, for having talked to her so incessantly that she had no ear for Gushmore. At that, I'd have earned it.

But with an honorary degree attached to my

name I'd be respectable. No hope of evading it any longer. Indeed, with the book I was going to write, the full professorship that it would bring me, I'd be respectable anyway. No doubt it was time. What profit had I ever got out of those women who could always count on me to fill a vacancy at the dinner table, who could always be sure that I'd step into the breach when one of the girls got a headache on a Broadway dancing party, and had to be taken home while the rest went on with the merriment? I hated them all, as fiercely as I hated this Agnes on whom I was going to have to waste the next two weeks, this Hazel who was likely to be thrown on my hands for the summer, if I didn't look out. And while I was hating all women with conscientious vigor an orchestra somewhere indoors began to play selections from "*Madame Butterfly*," and I thought of Lucile.

Puccini, or moonlight, or roses and honeysuckle, or the third Tom Collins always reminded me of Lucile. Boy-and-girl sentiment, no doubt, but pleasant to remember after seven years, when everybody regarded me as Old Faithful, the shaggy watchdog who could be trusted to take the girls to school; when I was about to graduate even from that stage to the irreproachable rectitude of a full professorship and a Litt. D. The Lucile affair might have been foolish, but it was full of thrills. I wondered how she got on with her husband; they'd looked me up two or three times on trips to New York, and cold reason told me they had always seemed happy enough. But I was in no mood for cold reason, just

now. I wished her husband would—well, not die, but desert her in atrocious circumstances, which would give me a chance to display my magnanimous nature . . .

Then I heard Goodhue's voice down the veranda. With a sigh I buried the past, got up, and went forward to meet my fortune.

It was no very exciting fortune, at first sight. Agnes hadn't changed in the least, in ten years. She was as I remembered her, a fat frump, whose clothes, such as they were, hung on her as a circus tent hangs on the center pole; with blonde hair and a vague blue eye, and an inexplicable air of authority. Goodhue was beside her, half a dozen genuflecting acolytes hung on her heels.

She said she was happy to meet again the son of my sainted father; that I had been quite a lad when she last saw me—there was only three years' difference between us—and that it was quite pleasant to meet old acquaintances so far from home. Then the retinue brought up chairs, and Goodhue, with a Machiavellian deftness that I hadn't suspected, placed me next her. The conversation went on.

For some time it went on without me, or Goodhue. The acolytes did their best to freeze us out. They were male and female, neither very pronounced; I gathered that they were all engaged in some form of social elevation; and they had clustered around Agnes more or less by accident, it seemed. She had come east alone, to Asbury Park where Zaccheus had spent his holidays in his youth; and these uplifters, happening to be there, had smelled money from

afar and flown to it like bees to the flower. I surmised that Agnes was used to that; it had been happening to her for years, wherever she went; and, unhappily, she was also used to their manner. They were voluble, but with an instinctive deference, an untaught sense of when to stop talking so as to leave the field clear for Agnes's pearls of thought. They talked of the higher good and the larger responsibility, and from time to time Agnes would settle whatever phase of the higher good was under discussion by a brief sentence dropped with the air of the Supreme Court denying an appeal. Whereupon the acolytes bowed the head and murmured: "Yes, quite true, Mrs. Clevenger."

As for me, not being very strong on the larger responsibility, I merely sat and looked at Agnes. And as I contemplated her I felt a stir of hope. Looking at Agnes was not exactly a recreation, just now; but it could be. She had the raw material of beauty. Her skin was a satiny rose-and-cream, of the type that usually means loving care. There was no chance of that with Agnes; probably she'd never heard of beauty clay, undoubtedly she looked on cosmetics, beyond unscented soap and cold water, as inventions of the Evil One. Yet the complexion was there, a complexion for which the girls I knew would cheerfully have slaved half their mornings; it was the gift of Providence. Her eyes were earnest, but there was nothing wrong with them except that; and she had marvelous pale gold hair, arranged as unbecomingly as possible.

A fat frump, I'd called her in my first irritation; yet she wasn't really fat. She had an ample figure of the type ordinarily known as voluptuous, though that was not a word to be used in connection with Mrs. Clevenger. Her clothes refused to acknowledge the figure, yet even the clothes might have been worse. They were merely clothes, unconsidered coverings; there was nothing in bad taste, or indeed in any taste at all. Agnes might be taught. In the hands of a woman who knew——

But I wasn't a woman, and I didn't know. Yet I wished some fairy godmother could take charge of Agnes, for, as Goodhue had said, New York was going to see her. Not impossibly some of my friends would see me with her; and she was nobody to be seen with just now.

When Goodhue finally got us into the dining-room, shaking off the acolytes, I had said hardly a word. As it turned out, nothing was the best thing I could have said. I had sat in sullen silence, thinking about Agnes and her clothes; and I presently inferred that Agnes had taken my grumpiness for contempt of her hangers-on. For she took pains to apologize, and to explain that they were only chance acquaintances. Apparently for Agnes the judgment of a Deupree was still the sum of all wisdom. That was a good start.

"I'd hoped to come on here for a few days of rest, alone," she said. "My mode of life is rather wearing. So much to do—and so little done, as some one has said. All my committees—and I always

make it a practice to investigate personally every request for funds, so of course that takes a great deal of time. I've needed a rest."

"But you're coming up to New York to-morrow," I suggested, hoping that she'd decide to do some more resting in Asbury Park.

"Oh, yes. I feel that is a duty, Dr. Deupree. You see, I've never seen New York, and I suppose it's part of one's education. Such a problem, too. So much wickedness."

I ventured a feeble protest.

"It is really a terrible problem," she went on, calmly overriding my remark. "The problem of the great city. I've given a great deal of thought to it, in connection with my work for agencies of betterment; but just lately, I've realized that this is nothing without first-hand study. Yet now that I'm so near I'm almost afraid of New York."

"You shouldn't be," said Goodhue, "with Dr. Deupree's guidance."

"Yes, that will be very fortunate."

"I don't know much about wickedness," I said meekly.

"Oh, certainly not. Your sainted father's son——"

"But if I could be of any service in showing you the town——"

"I should be very glad," said Agnes, "to see some of the worth-while sights in your company. Will you ride in with me in the morning—and you, Dr. Goodhue?"

"I must be getting back home," said Goodhue.

"I merely came East for a few days. But Dr. Deupree——"

"I'll be delighted to ride in with you," I told her. "The roads are excellent—much better than going by rail."

"Oh, I meant ride in on the train," said Agnes calmly. "I've never had an automobile. Mr. Clevenger, when he was alive, thought they were dangerous—and I—well, I can't afford it. Perhaps that seems strange, but with so many good causes needing money—not to speak of the income tax—it seems unjustifiable to waste it on personal pleasure."

I decided to plunge a little.

"I was going to hire a car for the drive back," I lied. "Come in with me, won't you?"

"Why—it seems very extravagant," she protested, "but if you don't feel a sense of responsibility, there's no reason why I shouldn't accompany you."

Well, this was encouraging, even though I couldn't afford thirty dollars for automobile hire. Evidently her scruples about the use of money were purely personal; she didn't object to sunlight and fresh air, if somebody else incurred the moral obloquy. My spirits rose; it seemed possible that well-timed casuistry might do wonders with Agnes.

As we passed out to the veranda after dinner, I considered that plump shapeless figure with some slight hope. It looked like a block of marble, but it was out of a block of marble that Pygmalion had shaped the statue that came to life. It was too much to hope for anything like that from Agnes,

and yet she seemed to be a simple, good-hearted girl, who'd have been nice, in a stuffy way, if she'd never had any money. I knew what had spoiled her, after hearing the conversation before dinner; it was the genuflecting acolytes, the mercenaries of the holy war. There could be no reason for the inevitable "yes-quite-true-Mrs.-Clevenger" except the knowledge that this woman had several million dollars, and often gave some of it away. After seven years without contradiction, Agnes had naturally become firm in her own opinions.

And I, who must gain this woman's confidence and do it quickly, began to wonder if the best method might not be the novel one of brutal frankness—always provided that the iron glove concealed the velvet hand.

There was no chance that night. Agnes seemed to be talked out, or listened out. Goodhue tried to make some remarks about the college, but she was almost rudely uninterested; and at half past nine she informed us that she always went to bed early.

I couldn't help asking her if she would turn in at half past nine in New York.

"Oh, New York!" she mused. "New York is different."

Assuring her that it was, I bade her a respectful good night, and went up to my room to smoke the cigar I'd been wanting for the last four hours. There was the Sunday paper, strewn across the bed; I perused it aimlessly, with the regular weekly succession of emotions—conviction that there were many things of importance in the world that I ought

to find out about, realization that life was too short if I had to find out from the Sunday paper, and eventual indifference as to whether I ever found out at all.

Then the picture sections. I looked through the news photographs, came to the advertising pages, and realized that one of my problems might be solved. Half the firms in New York seemed to be engaged in the praiseworthy business of making fat women look thin. Fat? I had been hasty and crude when I confessed such a thought. Agnes, I learned from the advertisements, had the full form; the Junoesque figure; statuesque proportions; the sort of figure that had been enjoyed by virtually all the famous women of history. True, it needed some attention—slenderizing seemed to be the word. But wasn't most of my town devoted to that very enterprise?

For the established religion of our city is the cult of the adipose Aphrodite, the perfect forty-six. This much I knew from Frances Hershfield, herself a thirty-four, who used to complain complacently that it was next to impossible for her to get fitted. We worship our goddess by denying her attributes, by telling her that she isn't stout, and that personally we prefer the stately figure, anyway. We know the incense that makes a sweet savor in her nostrils. She is fat; she would look thin. Actually to become thin would mean work—exercise, early hours, dieting, the avoidance of tempting calories; so, like loyal devotees, we labor to give her the effect without the effort; to make her look thin, every street is lined

with temple slaves of the chubby goddess. And in these shrines there must be corsets and brassières, devices and contrivances, that would make a new woman of Agnes . . . if, of course, I could get her started. That obstacle remained. But, once under way, my plans would move faster than Pygmalion's. He had to work in undraped marble. He could have done better with the help of the New York garment trade.

VII.

The Theory of Evolution.

AGNES and I got away in good time the next morning, with old Goodhue on the steps to see us off as we rolled away in a highly polished car, with my suitcase and Agnes's steamer trunk strapped on behind. It was all there but the streamers of white ribbon, and not without malice I left Goodhue to think it over. The sun was shining, and it was my morning to make hay.

Nothing much was said or done for the first half hour or so; Agnes was content to take the air. But the wind gave her a good deal of trouble with her hat, so she presently took it off with an air of reckless abandon. True, her hair was so trimly netted in that a tornado could hardly have ruffled it; heavy and yellow—my Golden Fleece. So far the expedition had been successful; the Golden Fleece was being carried off. But the carrying off, I remembered, had been only the beginning of Jason's troubles.

"Aren't you afraid of sunburn?" I asked.

"Oh, no. My skin is peculiar; the sun doesn't seem to affect it. Not that I should care greatly; I am not vain about my personal appearance."

She must learn better.

"When I was a student at Wyndham," I told her,

"they used to count vanity among the seven cardinal virtues. An extraordinarily beautiful lot of co-eds they had in those days."

Agnes frowned.

"I'm sure that's nothing to be vain about," she objected. "So that canker was eating into the college even in your father's time . . . I've been wanting to speak to you about the college, Dr. Deupree. All is not going well. Not at all. I didn't like to say anything about it while we were with Dr. Goodhue, for I'm afraid he may be responsible."

No wonder the old gentleman was worried. I demanded details, fearing some revelation of boot-leg murders and crimes of passion such as seem to happen nowadays at our best colleges. Agnes lowered her voice to the confidential tone of one who is compelled to say something indecent for a moral purpose.

"Dr. Deupree, they teach evolution at Wyndham College."

"Is that all?" I asked, immensely relieved. "Why, they've been teaching evolution there for fifty years."

"Oh, have they?" She was rather huffed. "Well, somehow it seems more serious now. I don't know why, but everything seems more serious now . . . Anyway, I don't like the tone at all. The young women—perhaps I shouldn't tell you this, Dr. Deupree, but the young women wear one-piece bathing suits in the gymnasium swimming pool."

"They always did, and I've no doubt they all wear them at home in the summer."

"Oh, is that so? Well, it doesn't seem proper, anyway. And they might be more careful about chaperoning the parties——"

"In my time we didn't have chaperones. Or need them."

"Really, Dr. Deupree! I can't understand this attitude in your father's son."

"Probably you can't," I said coldly, convinced that it was time for the mailed fist. "There are a good many things you don't understand, Mrs. Clevenger."

I was in for it now; she stared at me aghast.

"Why, nobody ever said such a thing to me before!"

"Quite true. Nobody ever did. But somebody will have to begin saying it some day, for the good of your soul; so here goes. Nobody has ever denied anything you said, for years; and you've managed to assemble the largest stock of misinformation I've ever had the bad luck to discover under one roof. You couldn't help it; people around you bowed, and sighed, and grunted, and agreed that you couldn't be mistaken. Why, if you said the earth was flat, your friends would come back with their yes-quite-true-Mrs.-Clevenger."

"Do you mean to say," she blazed, "that because of my money——"

"Not at all, not at all. That sordid influence might affect some persons, but not clergymen and social workers of the type with which you come in contact. No. They dare not contradict you because of the force of your personality, your determination, your iron will, the sheer driving power of you.

Your character is so strong that no one dares oppose you; so your very strength is doing you harm."

I paused to let that sink in, and it sank.

"It may be true," she said presently. "I—I had never had it presented to me in that light, but perhaps you are right. I know my character is a very strong one . . . So you think people are withholding from me things that—that should be said?"

"I know it." There was another pause; then she gathered herself together.

"Then tell me some of them."

Agnes was human! . . . But the hardest part of my work was before me; I cleared my throat and tried to look dependable.

"No one," I said, "has ever told you that you are beautiful."

She looked away, and presently said in a weak voice:

"But I am not."

"At this moment," I agreed, "you are not. But you ought to be. You have wonderful possibilities. Why don't you go to a real costumer, a real hair-dresser, a real corsetière? Powder that Grecian nose when it's shiny; take those high collars off that neck like a tower of ivory; throw away those cotton stockings and buy silk; give your soul a chance to breathe."

"Oh, Dr. Deupree!"

"Beautiful women are few," I assured her fervently, "rare oases in a desert of ugliness." (I wasn't used to this sort of stuff, so it came hard; but it seemed to get over with Agnes.) "There is

so much ugliness around us that women with this rare gift have no right to—to tie it up in a napkin and bury it.”

This was a wrong tack, despite the Scriptural allusion; she spoke up rather spiritedly:

“I prefer to be known for the beauty of my character.”

“Has any one told you that the two can’t go together?”

“They don’t very often,” she said severely. “Too much thought of the outward appearance, too much pride of the flesh, leads to forgetfulness of the useful side of life. And it is my desire to be a useful woman.”

“Of course you want to be a useful woman,” I said paternally. “And it is your duty to use all your gifts in furtherance of that high purpose. For a woman interested in social movements must work with men; and believe me, Mrs. Clevenger, as a man of the world”—this was pretty raw, but it seemed to impress her—“there are men whose nobler impulses can be awakened by a woman of rare beauty and personal charm, when one of merely ordinary appearance, one who gives no thought to other than moral considerations, is overlooked.

“You’re coming to New York. Your friends at home have known you all your life; they know what you are. But here people will know only what you look like. Do you want to fail of exerting your highest influence? If you want your ideals to prevail, you must be a striking and impressive figure. In New York, Mrs. Clevenger, one must put up a front.”

And then there was a long, heavy silence, while Agnes inspected the landscape and I studied the back of the driver's neck. I'd taken an awful chance; I might have ruined my hopes of doing anything with her. But, after all, she'd been prejudiced against the college; and at least I'd diverted her attention. I'd put thoughts into her mind that had never been there in all her useful life. And if she did take my advice, if she lived up to her possibilities, if she stopped being duckling and turned swan, I'd have an influence with her that couldn't be won by a hundred years of yes-quite-true-Mrs.-Clevenger.

In which case—— I stole a sidewise glance at her. The wind had loosened a strand or two of the golden hair, and it blew about her ears almost skittishly. An expert could make that Valkyrie figure a thing of beauty. And that smooth, curving cheek; it was fascinating to look at; it must be cool and comfortable to touch——

Wyndham College, its peril, and the plot for its rescue, faded gently out of mind, erased by a new and unforeseen and overpowering emotion. I desired to kiss Mrs. Clevenger.

At that moment, certainly, the thought of anybody kissing Mrs. Clevenger was grotesque; the thought of Mrs. Clevenger kissing anybody, profane. But they taught evolution at Wyndham College. Though science, in general, had gone over my head, I still remembered something about a little eohippus that had determined to be a horse, and eventually became a horse. Nor does evolution always proceed

by slow and steady development. Sometimes, if you believe the wise men, it goes by mutations, by sudden jumps. If Agnes took my advice she was on the verge of a considerable mutation; and so was I. If my Galatea really came to life, she'd be a good deal harder to handle than the consecrated woman whom Goodhue had intrusted to my care. As he had said, when they get started they travel fast. As somebody else had said, the bigger they are the harder they fall.

It was a dark and gloomy prospect for the grandson of Athanasius Deupree, but not so gloomy for the grandson of Jefferson Gaylord. And, anyway, I didn't care that morning. I waited till Agnes turned at last with a sigh and looked at me rather sadly.

“Am I really beautiful?” she asked.

I felt like giving the college yell.

VIII.

A Matter of Form.

WE stood in the prow of the ferryboat; Agnes was getting her first look at the skyline of Manhattan. Since nobody should be interrupted in that devotional ceremony, I lounged in the background, smoking a cigarette. Agnes was going to have to get used to cigarettes if she went around with me, and she might as well begin now, while the beginning was good. For, in my humble way, I'd gained an ascendancy over her.

A curl of blue smoke drifted about her head, but she didn't notice it; she was staring at the tall buildings, with an expression that I didn't dare interpret. There was New York and here was Agnes. It was going to be pretty hard to adjust them.

For under the spell of a soft kissable cheek I had dreamed dreams. Granted that Agnes was willing to adjust her clothes, and perhaps her disposition with them, to a more exacting taste, I had dreamed of trying to show her the New York that I knew and loved. My town. But could I interest her in the New York of the intellectual proletariat, that liked a little art and a little learning, a little work and a little play? It didn't seem probable, as I looked at her now. What of the thousand other New Yorks that I knew vaguely, or not at all? It was a large

town, with room enough for almost anybody to fit in, who wanted to fit. But it seemed doubtful that Agnes would want to.

Inevitably, I began to contrast her with the woman whom just at the moment I knew best—Frances Hershfield. Fan was the perfect type of the New York I lived in; and point by point she was the absolute opposite of Agnes. Fan was thin and dark and pretty; smartly dressed, though limited to the chic imitations of something really good that she could afford on a newspaperman's income; wise as the serpent, but—though she would never have admitted it—as harmless as the dove. Of course she liked to regard herself as a person of volcanic emotions, but that innocent delusion did no harm among those who knew her; and there was no doubt that she possessed all the sophistication that is within reach of the virtuous and poor.

Yes, Fan was New York. Jewish, I supposed, Christian perhaps; her face, her temperament, and her cast of mind were neither; they belonged to that blended middle type that is more and more pervasive on our island, that will some day dominate it, I suppose, a new race born of geography and social conditions, as different from its progenitors as the New Englanders from the old Englanders. Whatever race provides the ancestry, whatever religion and culture the background, the product is pure Manhattan.

That was the type I knew and liked, the people of my town. It made no particular difference where we came from; Manhattan was our town, the shrine

of each patriot's devotion—our fatherland not by accident of birth, but by the deliberate choice of immigration. Of what use to try to show that town to Agnes? I looked at her gloomily as she leaned against the rail. In principle, one question was settled—Agnes was going to dress up, if she could. But clothes were not all; underneath the clothes would remain the elemental Agnes, without form and void. Clothes or no clothes, I'd better give up the hope of making her see what I saw, and content myself with killing time at the Aquarium and the Woolworth Building. Who was I to hew the woman out of the block of marble—who was I to breathe into her the breath of life?

Then the chauffeur came up and asked me where we wanted to go, and I had to interrupt her.

"Why," she began hesitantly, "I'd thought of going to one of the Y. W. C. A. homes . . . But I don't believe I will. Do you know anything about hotels, Dr. Deupree?"

"A little. There's the Ritz, the Plaza, the Ambassador, the Biltmore, the Waldorf——"

"I believe the Martha Washington is well spoken of," said Agnes.

"It is indeed."

"Then I think I'd better go there. I'd feel safer."

"Perhaps you'll dine with me this evening, after you've had time to get settled," I suggested. "I don't want to interfere with your plans, but if you expect to see much of New York before the conference——"

Her eyes went back to the skyline.

"There's a good deal of it, isn't there?" she said wistfully. "But I don't think I'd better dine with you to-night. To-morrow, perhaps; but I want to do some shopping first."

This was encouraging, at any rate.

"Of course, I know nothing about the stores in New York," she went on. "Really, I'm quite at a loss how to begin."

So was I. What did I know about women's clothes, or where to buy them? I was a blameless bachelor. But Agnes evidently expected me to advise her, and I couldn't fail her at this first demand.

"You know some women here," I suggested. "Perhaps they could——"

"No," said Agnes thoughtfully. "They are not much concerned with their personal appearance. I shouldn't care to have them make any suggestions as to mine. Perhaps we'd better let this remain—well, just between us, you know."

There was something pathetic in that; I was used to girls who came to me for advice they could just as well have got from their brothers, but it was the first time I'd ever been expected to be a sister to anybody. And the intimacy of her tone reawakened worries. She seemed to feel that since I'd started this, she could count on me to carry it through.

"Let me think," I muttered. She let me, but thinking didn't help. Edith might have saved me, but Edith's ideas of family obligation worked only in one direction. She was a Radcliffe graduate; the welfare of Wyndham College was nothing to her.

Besides, if Agnes were going to plunge on her clothes I wanted her to look better than Edith.

Frances—but Frances knew only the Broadway shops that served the middle class. Agnes could afford the best; and while Frances might have walked around in the best, and priced things, she couldn't know their wares from experience. And I'd been almost rudely cold to her since that night she went to sleep in the taxi. I liked her, and all that; but the irritation of that unintended insult still lingered. Frances seldom turned the other cheek; if I knew her she was whetting a sharp knife for me and my friends.

Yet something had to be done. If I left Agnes to herself, she was likely to start off by buying red shoes. That would be her idea of the New York atmosphere.

Then I thought of Bonner.

"I have a friend," I said, "whose wife dresses very well." Strictly, that was somewhat inaccurate; Bonner at the moment had no wife. But I had seen the wives he had had; I knew they had dressed well. I had seen, more recently, his alimony checks; presumably they dressed well still.

"You think perhaps she could go with me?" Agnes suggested timorously. "If it wouldn't put her out——"

"She's out of town," I interposed, "but I can find out from him where she gets her clothes. I'll call you up at the hotel in an hour or so."

That seemed to suit her; so I left her at the Martha Washington, paid my driver with a sinking

heart—assistant professors' incomes aren't built to stand the shock of thirty-dollar taxi bills—and hunted a telephone booth.

"Bill," I demanded when my call had passed through three or four secretaries and assistants to Bonner himself, "where did your wives get their clothes?"

"Where didn't they?" he responded bitterly. "Don't I still get bills, and mean letters from collection agencies, even after my last decree is final? . . . Why?"

"I have a friend," I began. "I mean, that is, a woman I used to know back home is in town and wants to buy some clothes. And I thought you could tell me the names of the shops——"

"I sure can, doc. Know 'em all by heart, and a bitter memory attached to every one. But look here! You can't afford——"

"I'm not affording," I said indignantly. "It isn't that at all. She's affording. And she can afford the best. She's worth about eight million——"

"Has she got a car?" he asked excitedly. "Has she got a Sagamore?"

"No car at all."

"Where is she?"

"Wait," I begged him. "One thing at a time. Maybe you can sell her a car later on, but she's just getting used to the notion of spending money. She's willing to buy clothes, but it comes hard. Now if you'll tell me the names of those shops——"

My arm ached as I jotted them down in lead pen-

cil on an old envelope—countless shops, specializing in everything. And even when he had finished I had to ask for further guidance.

“She doesn’t know much about clothes, Bonner, and she’s never been here before. Some of these places must be more honest than others. I don’t want her to get into a den of thieves where they’ll sell her something atrocious merely because it’s expensive.”

“They won’t sell her anything atrocious unless she makes them. It’s no boost for a shop, see, to send out a customer lookin’ like the last days of Pompeii. If she wants it they’ll let her have it; but if she just don’t know, and is willing to take advice, she’s all right. Those girls are trained to bring out the good points.”

I had another worry.

“She has a—a rather statuesque figure,” I explained. “There must be places that specialize in——”

“Oh, they all specialize in jumbos. They’d go into bankruptcy if they didn’t. Not that there ain’t plenty of thin women, but the fat women have the money . . . Er—what’s she like?”

“Why, she’s a—a very fine woman——”

“Yes, yes; I know that. I mean what does she weigh?”

“Why——” These sordid details were beneath me. How did I know what she weighed? “I don’t know. She’s fairly heavy. But there are possibilities, Bonner; there are possibilities.”

“Don’t I know there’s possibilities,” he said jo-

vially, "or you wouldn't be playin' around with her, you old devil. No, doc, what I meant to tell you—if she's carryin' more weight than she wants to show—and Lord knows most of 'em are—you send her up to the Maison Mazola on 57th Street, and tell her to ask for Geraldine. Do that first. This Geraldine is the best landscape architect in town. She kept my second wife lookin' like a welterweight long after she belonged with the heavies."

I thanked him, but he was reluctant to let me go.

"See here, doc, I want to know all about this. I thought it was queer, all this stuff about goin' to work this summer. Too busy to play around—huh! I want——"

But I hung up, just beginning to realize that it would be highly desirable to keep Agnes out of sight of my friends this week, no matter what she might look like after Geraldine of the Maison Mazola got through with her. Why stir up the animals? For Bonner had called me an old devil, and no Deupree had ever been called an old devil before.

I telephoned the list to Agnes, conveyed Bonner's recommendation about landscape architecture as delicately as possible, and told her I'd call to-morrow. She seemed grateful; things were beginning well—too well, in fact. My misgivings of the morning were returning. I didn't know what I had started, but it was on its way. I could hardly stop it now. After all, Agnes was Agnes. I'd undertaken to make her over into somebody whom the original Agnes wouldn't recognize when she saw her in the mirror; and unless all the writers on the psychology

of clothes were liars, the transformation would go deeper than the skin. This morning I had feared that I couldn't change her; now I was afraid I could. Pygmalion was remaking a soul, and those who tamper with souls must be prepared to answer for it.

Of course, worrying about souls—their own, or other people's—is the national pastime of the Deuprees. But I was worried now not only about Agnes's soul, but about my own. Who was I to change the order of creation—to speed up the process of evolution for my own ends—to drop the yeast into the grape juice? Let Nature take its course—but it was too late to let Nature take its course. Even as I got into the subway to go back to Morningside, Nature had been superseded, and Geraldine of the Maison Mazola was taking her course.

Yes, my own soul was more to be worried about than Agnes's. I had begun to use casuistry, and subtle arguments. The morals of this procedure were doubtful, its safety still more so. I was no expert in casuistry; if anything beyond a lazy good nature had made me popular with those women whom I had now renounced, it was my transparent sincerity. I didn't want to be sincere, but I couldn't help it; I was made that way. Now for the first time I had tried insincerity and found a kick in it. The thing could easily become a habit . . .

Thoroughly frightened, I spent the afternoon in my apartment, wondering what I could tell Gushmore's conference about colleges and the mentally unfit, but too nervous to start work. I would chastise my soul and mortify the flesh, I decided, by

dining alone at the cafeteria in the next block; but it was not to be. As I came out on the street there drew up in front of the apartment house a majestic and luminous apparition—Bonner and his car, or rather the car and Bonner; his own amiable fatness was quite overawed by its splendor. I'd never seen such a car; an enormous limousine, painted blood red, with shiny nickel trimmings. Its interior, of pearl gray brocade, was adorned with pockets and shelves and drawers, a vase of flowers, a humidor, a folding table; trappings whose very purpose was beyond the imagination of an assistant professor. It was as rigorously ascetic as an apartment at the Ritz, as furtive and inconspicuous as a fire engine.

"The Midyear Sagamore," said Bonner proudly. "If the alimony gets any worse I'm goin' to give up the apartment and live in this. Where you goin'?"

"Dinner."

"So am I—Larkspur Country Club, up in Westchester. Come along."

I climbed in promptly and without suspicion; but when we had driven silently up into the farther Bronx he turned at last and glanced at me with the cheerful grin of one sinner to another.

"Now, doc, how about this woman?"

"She's an old friend of the family," I said discreetly. "Just coming to town to look around."

"Did I hear you say eight million?"

"You heard me. And because I'm the only person she knows well in New York, I seem to be expected to look after her. Tell her where to buy her

clothes, and all that. Be a sort of guidebook and dictionary of good form and Travelers' Aid Society for her."

"Some job."

"It is," I groaned. "I hardly know where to begin. What would you advise me to do with her? You know all about women."

"Well, doc—if I had your job, and your salary, I'd marry her."

"Don't be an ass," I told him. "I don't want to get married. Not that she does either, so far as I know——"

"Never can tell till you try, doc. But you ought to get that money in circulation somehow. If you don't marry her, at least let me sell her a car."

I thought that over as we drove out along the Pelham Parkway, with a cool breeze from the Sound ruffling my hair. Summer had come, over the week end; and next week I'd be in Westchester with Agnes. It would be more agreeable to spend part of the week driving around the Westchester hills than to devote morning, noon, and night to the segregation of the socially inefficient. And the best possible way to keep her out of Gushmore's reach; for he'd have to stick to his conference.

Besides, Agnes needed the education.

"She'd never miss nine thousand dollars," I remarked. "The name is Clevenger. The address is the Martha Washington Hotel."

"I'll have her sold by the end of the week," he asserted confidently. "She buys the car, she hires

the chauffeur, she pays for the upkeep—we don't pretend the Sagamore will do more than four miles to the gallon—and you lounge on the brocaded seat beside her and get the benefit. Not so bad, eh, doc?"

IX.

Frances Tells All, and More.

NOT so bad . . . Yet after Bonner had brought me home, and I had settled down to read a little before going to bed, my apprehensions persisted. To-morrow I might see Agnes in her new clothes, and Heaven only knew how she would look. To-morrow I'd have to start taking her around, and Heaven only knew what I'd do with her. My unprofitable experience with women was unprofitable still. Whatever my relations with Agnes were to be, I couldn't quite see her as party of the second part in one of those affectionate friendships in which I had specialized; it didn't seem likely that her head would ever drop on my shoulder in sisterly confidence. And long experience as a brother of the girls had perhaps unfitted me not only for romance but for more distant relations as well. It was an ingrown habit; it would be hard to break.

I threw away the stub of my last cigarette and realized that I must get some more if breakfast were not to be ruined. I trudged out to the nearest tobacco store, bought a package, and stepped out into the flood of homeward-bound movie addicts from the theater around the corner. And here, alone, was Fan. I didn't want to talk to her, but she was

pleasant to look at after long contemplation of the raw material of Agnes. I paused and looked just long enough for her to see me.

I'd have passed on with a nod, but she stopped me.

"Alec, what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Pooh! Don't tell me. You've been avoiding me. And I know why. It was what I said to you the other night. Poor Alec! I didn't know."

"Know what?"

"Walk home with me," she said. "Let's talk it over."

From force of habit I fell into step and we pushed our way out of the movie crowd. But I was going to be firm. She'd want to bring me back into service, but I didn't intend to be brought . . . If she were taking me home, she was following the longest way around; for all of a sudden we came out on Morningside Drive, where our hilltop falls away in a wooded cliff to the flats of Harlem. Here a broad pavement, girt in with iron railings, bordered the edge of the bluff; a pavement strewn with benches on which murmuring couples sat close together in the dusk. Frances found an empty bench and drew me down beside her.

"You poor boy! I didn't dream you cared for me—in that way."

Dazed by surprise, I said nothing. It was far from the best thing to say at the moment; but it was the best I could think of. So she went on:

"And because you're the dearest friend I have

in all the world, I want to tell you just how things are. It will make you feel better, maybe; and me, too." (What did I care how she felt? Why wouldn't she let me go home?) "Alec, I—I'm in love with my husband."

"But, my dear girl," I sputtered, "of course you're in love with your husband. Far be it from me to object to that. Jerome's a prince. I love him myself. One of the finest fellows in the world; any girl would be lucky——"

"Oh, do you think so?" she interjected rather peevishly. "You don't see a man's faults when you're not married to him. Jerome has plenty of faults; and being a newspaperman makes it worse, the hours he has to keep and the people he has to meet. I tell you, Alec, it's hard to be a newspaperman's wife."

Hard, indeed. Frances, with no children, and only a three-room apartment to care for, had an excellent excuse for sleeping till noon every day; for staying up hours after other people had gone to sleep; for thinking up parties that squandered the time and money of her bachelor friends, but kept her from being lonesome of nights while Jerome was working in the office. I could have wept for her—but if I had any tears, I needed them for myself. For she continued:

"But after all he's my husband. And I love him, faults and all. I'm awfully proud, Alec, to know that you love me; honestly I never suspected it, and now that I know, I just want to cry, I'm so sorry I'm not twins. I think it was so brave and loyal of you

not to speak of it—not to break up the beautiful relationship between you and me and Jerome——”

“Fan——” I began hoarsely; but my voice stuck in my throat. Indoors I could have created a diversion by knocking over the goldfish; here I could only get up with a sudden jerkiness that must have convinced her the topic was too painful.

“I do love you, Alec, but not the same way, of course. So, my dear, I thought it would be best for us to talk it over, and try to keep it from spoiling things.”

Perhaps I could have interrupted her then; but to tell a lady that I didn’t love her, when she was so obviously delighted by the conviction that I did, would have been rather more brutal than I liked; and by the time I concluded that brutality would save some trouble it was too late. She was off again.

“Because, my dear, as I said, nobody ever thinks of you in that way, so we just supposed you never thought of anybody in that way either. And now I know how you feel about me, I—it scares me, Alec. It’s a terrible responsibility for me. Because I don’t want this thwarted emotion to wreck your life . . . Alec, I’m unselfish enough to hope that it won’t spoil everything for you. I’m not the only girl in New York.” (She plainly felt that this was a good deal of a concession.) “You’ll meet some one else—no, no, don’t deny it—who can give you what I can’t——”

“I haven’t seen her yet.”

“Of course not; you’re so brave and loyal. But you will some day, Alec, and I want you to know

that I'll be happier than anybody else when that day comes."

"I don't want to get married," I said, thankful to be able to speak one sentence of truth.

"Of course you don't, now; but——"

"Not at all," I growled.

"Alec!" She was worried. "Alec—you're not going to—to let yourself go, are you?"

"We never let ourselves go, in my family."

"Because it would make me feel so terribly, to think that I'd driven you to something wild. Oh, we ought to have known you wouldn't just play around and be friendly to everybody all your life; that some day you'd go wild about some girl—— But isn't it hard luck that it was me!"

"Fan," I began, "you don't quite understand——"

"Well, I understand this much, you poor thing, that I care more for you than for anybody but my husband, and I'm not going to have you avoiding me the way you've been doing the last few days. I might have known there was something wrong as soon as you pretended that you had to work this summer. That wasn't like you, Alec. So please don't stay away from us any more, will you?"

"But I'd better. I really have to work——"

"Oh, let's drop all pretense, my dear. I know how you feel about seeing me, now; but if you stay away Jerome will notice it, Alec. He'll know there's something wrong. I could tell him, of course; he might be angry if it were anybody else, but he trusts

you. But I'd rather not tell him. Let's keep this, Alec, as our secret."

She was still clinging to my hand, so I sat down again, the better to hide our secret. There was a sudden stir of disengagement on the farther benches as a policeman passed slowly along the Drive; then a settling back as he vanished into the darkness. I hadn't realized that I lived in such an amorous neighborhood; and perceiving that Fan and I must look as bad as the others, I got up again, with determination.

"I must take you home," I said firmly. "Let's forget this. Put it out of mind."

"I think that's awfully brave of you," she assured me as we strolled away. "But please don't stay away from us. It would betray everything. And Rachel's coming, so you can talk to her if things become too tense for you to be with me as much as you used to. Now *please* don't think I'm trying to throw you two at each other——"

"I thought Rachel had a husband."

"Oh, she's divorcing him; he drinks like a fish. I know you'll like her, Alec; she's a peach. But of course she's rather disillusioned with men, and life; so you two will be safe in each other's company."

Nothing I had heard that evening pained me so much as that. If Rachel looked like her photographs she would attract anybody; and she looked enough like her sister to have a particular attraction for anybody who might have a hopeless love for Frances. If I had really cherished such an affec-

tion, I'd have been as ready to fall into Rachel's arms as Rachel, presumably, would be ready to fall into the arms of a man recommended by her sister, a man guaranteed to be the opposite of her late husband. And Frances had assumed that I was too stupid to see it.

Rachel, evidently, would have to be avoided; and that meant avoiding Fan, too.

"I think I'd better stay away," I told her. "You can tell Jerome I have to write a book; he'll believe it, even if you don't."

"And you'll promise me not to do anything wild?" she sighed.

"Anything wild? Me?"

"Run around with wild women, or anything like that? Oh, Alec, I'm afraid you're going to take this harder than I thought. And—I know you, my dear, better than you know yourself. If you let yourself go, you'd go so awfully far. I could never forgive myself. Promise me, Alec, that you won't."

"I promise," I said solemnly. It seemed as safe as promising not to run for president.

"You'll be glad of it, when you meet that other girl that some day——"

"So you think I'll meet some other girl some day who might——"

"Care for you as you care for me? Why, of course. I don't see how any woman could help loving you," she said warmly (and very handsomely, I thought) "unless she happened to be in love with somebody else first."

That settled it. I would stay away from Rachel.

“Of course,” she pursued, “you’re rather quiet, Alec, and so terribly intellectual. I think you’d be happiest with a woman less deeply emotional than myself; some sweet, quiet girl who’d sympathize with your interests, and wouldn’t demand more than your temperament could give——”

It must have been the devil who suggested to me that this was a pretty good description of Agnes Clevenger.

X.

Facile Descent of Galatea.

IN the morning I telephoned to Agnes, and it seemed to me there was a faint trace of increasing liveliness in her tone.

"I spent yesterday shopping," she said. "After being among strangers, it is good to hear a friendly voice again."

As for me, after Fan's friendly voice yesterday evening I felt that it would be good to associate with a comparative stranger. Agnes and I would meet half way. So I asked her how soon I could see her.

"I shall be busy all day," she admitted.

"Busy?" I asked in some alarm. Was Gushmore on the trail?

"Shopping," she explained, rather hesitantly. "I—I didn't realize how much I needed."

"Well, you can't shop after dark," I reminded her, "so won't you dine with me?"

"I should be very glad."

"And perhaps," I suggested, "we could see a play afterward." This was a bit incautious, for old Zaccheus had frowned on the drama; but Agnes, it seemed, was more liberal.

“That would be delightful, Dr. Deupree. Some dramatic production of the higher sort——”

“Have you any preferences?” I asked, beginning to feel shaky again.

“Oh, no, I leave that to you. I have full confidence in your taste. Besides, this is your town.”

So it was; yet when I started downtown that evening I hadn't made up my mind where to dine or what play to see. Ordinarily there was no trouble in entertaining people from back home. I could take them to one of the Italian table d'hôtes in Greenwich Village, where they were convinced they were seeing the *Vie de Bohême*, and then to almost any play of no great consequence, for preference a musical comedy. But I didn't imagine that Agnes would look with favor on musical comedy or the Bohemian atmosphere. Besides, those table d'hôte dinners of minestrone, spaghetti, and roast chicken were hard to wash down without the red wine that had ceased to flow, and had never flowed for Agnes. I'd sat at table with her at Asbury Park, and she ate copiously. Her disposition might be the gift of Providence, but her figure was self-made. When she dined with me, I must feed her well.

However, both the restaurant and the rest of the program must depend on Agnes—on what she looked like, and how she felt, after a day of shopping. Curiosity as to both details rose as I went into the Martha Washington and sat down in the lobby to wait for her. Agnes lingered, obviously putting on something new, while I sat alone with women all around me—unescorted women, who looked at me as

if I were a speck of dust on a good housekeeper's mahogany, to be wiped off as soon as a dustcloth could be found.

Then, at last, I saw her descending the onyx staircase. Delirious hopes of some miraculous change, wild fears of the grotesque purchases Agnes might have made unaided, were both disappointed; her simple dark costume made no particular impression on me, but something else did. Geraldine, the landscape architect of the Maison Mazola, had lived up to her reputation. Agnes had a figure at last.

Certainly it was a Junoesque figure, a full form; but it was a figure. A trifle Oriental—yes, undeniably voluptuous; but a figure, shapely and effective. So, she had taken advice; she could be taught. She was handsome, and she must know it. That meant that she would stay handsome; there would be no relapse.

As she descended slowly, not knowing where to seek me, I had time to look her over with some care. The figure wasn't the only renovation. Something had happened to that golden hair; nothing less, I realized in amazement, than a permanent wave. Now for the girls I knew, getting a permanent wave was a serious business; it required weeks of saving out of pocket money, an appointment made days in advance, and finally six hours of discomfort so intense and exhausting that they usually left the beauty salon only to go home and to bed.

Yet Agnes had worked it in as a mere incident of a day of intensive shopping, and here she was ready for an evening of pleasure. Fat or no fat, her body

must be strong and tireless; and clearly when she decided to do a thing she went about it with vigor and determination. Also, she had an enormous amount of money to spend. That made a difference; and it would make a still bigger difference if she really decided to begin to spend it. She might go far . . .

As for the clothes, to which my eyes came back, they were all right; that was a novelty, and as much as could be expected. A dark dress, almost black, trimmed here and there with silver embroidery; a silver-trimmed black turban to match it. The businesslike boots of the morning had been replaced by single-strap black pumps, and the stockings were of black silk, discreetly clocked in silver. Altogether, I thought, while it was nothing that anybody would turn around to look at, it was pretty good for Agnes.

Then, just as she saw me at last and came toward me eagerly, I realized that half the women in the lobby had turned around to look at her.

She looked a little proud and very much scared; but my face must have reassured her.

"You're charming," I said. "Why didn't you do this a year ago?"

She blushed, reviving a lost art; and I saw a bit of evidence that convinced me that the reformation had been complete. Over one eye a pale smudge marked the spot where rice powder had been inexpertly applied by the unpracticed hand.

"I did what they told me to do," she said humbly. Do you really like it? These clothes would be too

gay to wear at home, among people who know me; but I thought perhaps in New York——”

“I can’t tell you how a lady ought to dress in New York,” I confessed rashly, “but from the way the other ladies look at you I think you’ve made a good start. Let’s go and dine at the Biltmore.”

“I haven’t heard of it,” she said, “but if you advise it, it must be all right.”

So we started uptown in a taxi, both of us silent. Agnes, I suppose, was silent because she was getting used to the new clothes; but I was trying to get used to the new Agnes, and her probable effect on other people. Those women hadn’t looked at her clothes out of mere idle curiosity. Even I, on second inspection, could see that they were far from ordinary. And I began to be gnawed by the terrible suspicion that I was sitting beside an accomplished miracle, a woman dressed in perfect taste.

It was painful to confess that I had been unable to recognize perfect taste when I first saw it; yet it seemed probable. The girls I knew dressed well, but they couldn’t afford the best; and I, like most proletarians, knew the aristocracy only as I saw them infrequently, strolling on the Avenue, or in opera boxes dimly seen from the dress circle. Perfect taste, in New York, rarely comes out in public; if indeed it could be found anywhere. Why should I suppose it was common in the plutocracy? If you could afford the best, you probably had your own ideas of the best; as likely as not, eccentric ideas. Agnes, who could afford anything and knew nothing, was the perfect customer; if only she had sense

enough to keep on knowing nothing, and taking what they sold her, she might surprise my town.

So we came to the Biltmore and dined high up in a huge blue-lit room, through whose open windows we could look out, and down, into a blue haze strung with golden points of light. It was something to look at, but Agnes was taking all her scenery indoors this evening. There was no use in wasting flowers of conversation on her; she resigned the ordering of the dinner to me, and settled back to look at the other women and fix things in her mind.

"You didn't tell me one dressed," she said severely.

"This one doesn't."

"Well, the others do."

So they did, most of them. Even dinner coats were scarce; most of the men were in the full splendor of swallow tails and white vests. Nearly all the women wore evening gowns, the fatter the lower; and there were jewels, large and glittering and crying for notice—jewels by the peck.

I could have told her, of course, that these people were all from Detroit—there was some sort of automobile convention in town; but why spoil her evening? She'd come to see New York, not Detroit; and but for the unexpected help of Detroit I'd have fallen down in my first attempt to show her the New York she was looking for. It was just beginning to dawn on me that, after all, Agnes was not wholly a stranger to my town. She had seen New York already, with that inward eye that is the bliss of solitude. What she had pictured in her mind she would

expect to see. Whether it was here or not, I'd have to show it to her.

Well, it was here, of course. You could find anything and everything in New York. Assistant professors, limited by poverty and respectability, might not know where to find anything and everything; but I knew my town pretty well, and I thought I could find anything that Agnes might want. But I mustn't fail as I had so nearly failed to-night; I mustn't leave it to chance visitors from Detroit to gratify her dreams of metropolitan splendor. I must live up to Agnes . . .

"There's a woman smoking," she whispered. "And another. Oh, yes, I know such things happen; but I'm not used to appearing to countenance such practices by my presence. You don't think, do you, that my remaining in the room would weaken my influence for good with people who know me?"

"But," I reminded her, "nobody who knows you is likely to see you here."

"How true that is!" she exclaimed. "I hadn't thought of it in that light before, but I suppose you are right. You see, this is quite a novel experience for me. A new world, in fact. Of course I cannot approve of everything I see, but I am broad-minded enough to realize that there are two points of view. One must understand the psychology of the other side."

"So one must," I agreed as the food began to arrive.

"You've put me quite at my ease," she went on reflectively. "The mere fact that you seem versed

in the ways of the world—the head waiter’s deference did not escape me—is proof that one can observe phenomena, if you understand me, without losing contact with fundamental principles.”

I could give her no argument on that, and it didn’t seem best to tell her that I owed the head waiter’s deference to Harmon Torrey, with whom I had occasionally lunched here. I shone but with a borrowed light, but since it was borrowed from Harmon’s gilt-edged investments, it was bright enough.

So, presently, we came to discussion of the play.

“There’s an excellent production of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ in town,” I suggested. “I suppose you’d prefer something classic——”

Agnes lifted her blue eyes from a plate of hors-d’œuvres and flooded me with a bland bovine gaze.

“I don’t believe we’d care much for that, do you? After all, Shakespeare in his lighter moments is very light, isn’t he? My tastes are rather more serious. I saw something in the papers about a play called ‘The God of Vengeance.’ That sounds like something that teaches a moral lesson.”

“It does,” I agreed. “So moral that the police are getting ready to shut it up.”

“Oh! One never knows, does one? Well, I’m quite in your hands, Dr. Deupree.”

“The Russian drama is quite popular at present,” I ventured.

“Oh, I don’t think I should care for that,” she said with surprising decision. “The Russians never seem to me to have a healthy moral tone.”

“But these plays are in the Russian language, Mrs. Clevenger. You won’t be able to understand them.”

“Then I don’t see much point in going to them, do you?”

I didn’t; though in the Russian craze of the past winter I hadn’t dared admit it. More light on Agnes; she seemed to have some hard sense. However, this didn’t settle the question of the play; and eventually we fell back on “Romeo and Juliet” after all, Agnes admitting, when pressed, that even in his lighter moments Shakespeare was still Shakespeare.

She was a good play companion; she didn’t talk while the curtain was up, nor much in the intermissions; and she took only a mild interest in the play. She was still looking around. Luckily the audience was rather smart; and the two extremest evening gowns were worn by offensively respectable dowagers, accompanied by a clergyman in the uniform of his calling. Agnes stared at them, but said nothing. She stared at girls smoking with men in the lobby, but she said nothing. And if she saw people staring at her, she said nothing about that. She was a swan who still thought she was a duckling, a pleasant novelty after so many whose delusion ran the other way.

Cheered by these negative merits, I suggested supper after the play, but she refused on the curious plea that she wasn’t hungry. So I put her into a taxi, and in a moment we were caught in the interwoven pattern of stationary automobiles that filled the street from curb to curb, horns clamoring vainly to the pink sky and the helpless policeman on the

corner—the theater-district traffic, that moves in short jerks at fifteen-minute intervals.

“To-morrow,” I suggested, “you’ll let me show you——”

“To-morrow I shall be very busy.”

“I don’t want to interfere with your other friends, Mrs. Clevenger, but——”

“I don’t expect to see any friends but you until we go to the conference. No, to-morrow I must spend in shopping. My wardrobe is still far from complete. My plans for filling it out will keep me busy to-morrow and a good part of Thursday. And the conference begins Friday, doesn’t it?”

“You’re not going to put me off like that,” I said boldly. “I must see you again before the conference. You can at least dine with me to-morrow night.”

“To-morrow’s prayer-meeting night,” she said with a severity that I couldn’t understand. Even on prayer-meeting night one must eat. Unless—unless to Agnes dinner on Manhattan, dinner amid evening gowns and cigarettes and music, was more than dinner, was a sort of Belshazzar’s feast . . . No, I couldn’t live up to this woman.

“But Thursday,” I said, “you’ll let me see you. Even if you’re shopping all day, you’ll let me see you at dinner.”

“Or supper,” she said demurely.

I couldn’t disappoint her again.

“Then we’ll make it a real party,” I said. “Dinner and supper, and the theater in between.”

With a swelling rattle of motors pierced by the

scream of horns, our army of cars got under way, rolled a block down Broadway, and stopped. The bright lights shone down on me and Agnes, serene in our open taxi; and from the eddying river of pedestrians along the sidewalk a single face flashed up at me for an instant, then out of sight, like a piece of driftwood bobbing in the current. Jerome Hershfield. And Jerome would probably tell Fan.

"That would be delightful," Agnes agreed. "Some modern drama, this time; for after all when one is in New York one should see New York, shouldn't one? Shakespeare is hardly what one wants to waste time on, on one's first visit."

"Our modern plays—the serious ones—run to discussion of ethical problems," I warned her. "You might not like them."

"Oh, but I feel that that is quite permissible. I am broad-minded. However revolting a subject may be in itself, when it is treated in a high-minded artistic manner one feels that it isn't so bad as if it were—well, merely a work of art without a subject, so to speak. We who deal with the world as it is must be prepared to face facts, Dr. Deupree."

Something roused me to perilous sincerity.

"Why face facts?" I asked her. "All known facts have been faced, in the last few years, and nobody seems to be any farther along. The morning paper is full of facts. Mrs. Clevenger, let me take you to the Follies."

"Oh, no! I couldn't think of that. I've heard of the Follies." This seemed final. Yet after the taxi had made another false start, and had come to

another jarring halt, she turned to me and observed:

“Of course, if you prefer something lighter in tone, I do not wish to insist. After all, this is your town. Yet there must be plays of lighter manner that treat serious subjects.”

It was clear that to Agnes anything was sanctified by a good gloomy problem.

“As what?” I asked.

“There is a type of play of which one hears much,” she said thoughtfully. “Very light in tone, perhaps, yet it seems to involve some serious problems that call for constructive thinking, about the future of our theater, and the texture of our social life, and whither we are drifting, and so on. I mean the—er—bedroom farces. Of course I’ve never seen one, and I quite deplore their existence; but since they exist, one ought to——”

“But they don’t exist,” I told her. “Not here. Not any more. They’ve gone out.”

“Gone out?” said Agnes irritably. “Out where?”

“Out to the stock companies—out to what this self-centered island calls the sticks. Probably one of them is playing in Indianapolis right now; but in New York they’re as dead as ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’”

“Oh,” said Agnes. “How fortunate that is. Well, Dr. Deupree, I leave the choice of a play entirely to you. . . . Yes, dinner and a play—that would be delightful. As to supper—I suppose it would be impossible to find a supper restaurant that has no cabaret.”

“Don’t be afraid of that,” I said. “It’s not only

possible, but easy. There are excellent restaurants, plenty of them, where there is only an orchestra, or no entertainment at all. After all, there are a lot of people who are merely hungry at midnight. We can escape the cabarets."

She considered.

"Of course, I shouldn't want to see places of that sort; yet it must be impossible to go about in New York without seeing a great deal of wickedness and violation of the law. And after all the mere fact that you should propose to take me to a cabaret is proof that it is possible for a serious-minded person——"

If this woman were ever to be brought down, it must be now.

"But I don't propose to take you to a cabaret," I expostulated. "I don't want to go to one myself. I—Mrs. Clevenger, you don't quite understand. I'm not addicted to this night life. In fact, I hardly ever go around on Broadway——"

She was looking at me with a smile that contained—miracle of miracles—a trace of archness.

"Now, Dr. Deupree! We know all about you back home. Don't you remember when the Paul Daltons from Wyndhamville came to New York?"

I didn't. There were always people from Wyndhamville in New York.

"It was while you were in the graduate school," said Agnes. "In 1916, I think. They came back and said you took them to Churchill's."

"What if I did?" I demanded. "Probably——"

"Oh, don't think I misunderstand. They said you

explained to them, when they were startled by what they saw, that one could go to places like that without altering one's fundamental ideals——”

I suppose I might have said that, Heaven help me, or anything else that in that simpler day would have dulled Mrs. Paul Dalton's pain at finding herself in close proximity to champagne bottles and hula dancers when her husband had asked me to show them something lively.

“But that was a long time ago,” I said feebly.

“Of course,” Agnes agreed. “Naturally you would have forgotten the incident, in the full life of a man-about-town. Some of your old friends were surprised to learn of the life you were leading, but I am not narrow-minded. I can understand. So you don't need to try to hide your familiarity with night life from me. Besides, didn't you tell me yourself that you were a man of the world?”

So that escape was barred. I tried another method, and endeavored to assume the Byronic air of one who has found pleasure only ashes in his mouth.

“Well, Mrs. Clevenger, granted that I know a little about Broadway; yet I don't like it. Let's forget theater parties and cabarets. If you have time on Thursday, let me show you the side of New York that I know best. The town that people live in, not the little bright-light district they play in—people who work and think and go home to dinner——”

Her face hardened like a block of limestone.

“Well, of course, if you insist. But it seems to me that on my first visit to New York it would be a

waste of time to see what I could see just as well in Indianapolis."

Indianapolis . . . I knew more than Agnes about what could be seen in Indianapolis. I had grown up under its shadow, the black shadow of the Great and Wicked City. For that was what Indianapolis meant to the moral element of Wyndhamville—the local Babylon, the sinful metropolis to which riotous students, afraid to unleash their debauchery in the college town, rushed off to drink beer, see a burlesque show, and come back with the air of having Plumbed the Depths. My father, grieving over the baleful attraction of Indianapolis for his undergraduates, had been heard to refer to it as Sodom and Gomorrah . . . But Agnes didn't know the Gomorrah side of her home town; when she wanted Gomorrah, she came to New York.

And since she wanted it, I must let her have it.

"It's your party, Mrs. Clevenger. I'm here to show you what you want to see."

"Oh, I shouldn't for the world have you think that I *want* to see such things; but I can't help feeling that one is unable to form an opinion about conditions, if you understand me, without seeing for oneself. Besides, as you have so well said, there are things you wouldn't do at home that would be all right in New York, where nobody you know would see you."

"I never said——" I protested.

"Oh, I think there is a great deal in that point of view," she assured me earnestly. "Not that I believe there should be any difference in standards in

a large city. Right is right, and wrong is wrong. But when one is striving to reach one's full usefulness it is possible to be in the world, yet not of it."

"Quite true, Mrs. Clevenger."

I had said it. I knew why people said it, now.

XI.

Hazel Makes the Front Page.

SO, the mischief was afoot. Galatea had taken hammer and chisel out of the sculptor's hands, to finish the job herself. I had started this enterprise, but now I could only stand aside and watch the inevitable sequence of cause and effect, the sublime operation of the principle of evolution.

It was nearly noon the next day when the telephone broke in on my exhausted slumbers, and as I struggled to wakefulness I heard Edith wailing:

"Oh, Alec! Come down right away. Something dreadful has happened."

"I know it," I assured her sleepily, "but how did you know it?" For she'd never heard of Agnes.

"I saw it in the papers," she groaned.

"What's this? What did you see in the papers?"

"Poor Hazel! She's utterly ruined."

Hazel! I'd forgotten all about Hazel, the sweet but stubborn little thing with twenty millions, whom I was expected to preserve from temptation. Thank Heaven, it was too late for that. If Hazel was utterly ruined already, my chaperonage couldn't help her. Hazel could be charged off as a total loss.

Yet when I said as much to Edith it appeared that there were degrees of ruin undreamed of in

my philosophy. Whatever the complete and irreparable disaster that had happened to Hazel—and Edith could only groan when I asked for details—it was only the beginning of progressive and cumulative ruin into which Hazel would certainly rush unless I, I personally, Alec Deupree, came down to Park Avenue this instant to let Edith lay her head on my shoulder while I told her what to do.

As usual, Edith had her way. Though I disclaimed all interest in the fate of Hazel, I promised to come down for lunch immediately, without even waiting for breakfast.

Edith had seen it in the papers. But the corner news stand had sold its last copy of the respectable morning paper that serves information to our university; there was nothing to be had but the morning editions of more excitable afternoon sheets. I bought one and ran for the subway, prepared to learn all about Hazel's elopement with a married man, Hazel's arrest for murder or arson, the loss of Hazel's money, or anything else that might reasonably be regarded as ruin. I didn't find what I was looking for, but I found something. Hazel had made the front page, under a two-column head:

TWELVE-MILLION-DOLLAR BEAUTY
HAS A WICKED WESTERN WALLOP

CALIFORNIA HEIRESS KNOCKS BROADWAY MASHER
THROUGH HABERDASHER'S WINDOW

Jack Dempsey's logical challenger appeared in Times Square yesterday afternoon, and did her stuff before a

crowd of admiring pedestrians. Well, maybe not Dempsey's challenger, for she's in the lightweight class and Benny Leonard is the one who wants to be scared. But those who saw her in action said that she'd have had even Dempsey plowing the rosin before the gong stopped the first round.

Who is she? William Bone of Nutley, N. J., who unexpectedly found himself acting as sparring partner, didn't know. When Dr. Rosenberg of Polyclinic Hospital revived him, he asked if it was an explosion or only a five-ton truck. Patrolman Jones of the West 47th Street station, who arrested Bone on the charge of disorderly conduct, could only say that she gave her name as Mary Smith of San Francisco, now staying at the Ritz. (An assistant manager of the Ritz said last night that no one named Mary Smith was registered there.) Magistrate Smiddker of the Night Court didn't know, for she didn't appear to press the complaint against Bone, who was accordingly discharged.

But a card dropped on the sidewalk said "Miss Deming"; and it was rumored that the lady with the wallop was no less a person than Hazel Deming, nineteen-year-old heiress of the late Jesse Deming, California oil magnate, who left his daughter a fortune estimated at \$12,000,000. Miss Deming is living at the Plaza, but a woman who refused to give her name and would say only that she was a friend of Miss Deming told reporters last night that Miss Deming was out, and refused further information.

Whoever she was, what she did to William Bone is enough to worry the Messrs. Dempsey and Leonard above mentioned. William was walking down Broadway yesterday afternoon. The lady who called herself Mary Smith of San Francisco was walking up Broadway. William Bone looks as much like Rodolph Valentino as he can. "Mary Smith," according to various eye-witnesses, looks like a sun-kissed peach, a dream of Heaven, a blue-eyed bearcat, or twelve million dollars. In front of the store of Levine Brothers, haberdashers, they met.

"Hello," said Willie, raising his hat with the Tut-ankh-amen band and flashing a welcoming smile. "Glad to see you again."

"Oh, is that so?" said Mary or Hazel or whoever she was. With that she swung a lithe right arm and slapped him on both cheeks; and tired business men as far uptown as Columbus Circle and as far downtown as Madison Square sat up at their desks and asked each other: "Did you hear that? Sounded like something broke."

Nothing was broken yet, but the break came in a hurry. Bone grabbed her hand, according to bystanders, and was preparing to hit her back. But while he was holding her right hand she landed two left jabs to the jaw, and when he let go she followed with a right swing that sent him through Levine Brothers' show window. The crash awoke Patrolman Jones, who arrested Bone to save him from further injury. Dr. Rosenberg of Polyclinic treated the victim for contusions and lacerations and he was locked up in the West 47th Street station.

Mary Smith or Hazel Deming, as the case may be, looked into the store and told them to send her a bill for the window, but Harry Levine said he'd paid \$50 for ringside seats to see worse than that, and that the window was a gift.

Ruin? Well, it wasn't my notion of ruin. Edith had exaggerated views of the disastrous effect of getting into the papers. It might look ruinous to her, but it was good news to me. For whatever this Hazel might intend to do this summer, it was clear that she could look after herself.

So I met Edith with the untimely smile of one who has come to see if there are any funeral baked meats left for the wedding feast. She wasn't smiling, and when I told her that I'd read the papers she began to groan some more.

"Why take it to heart?" I asked. "You certainly can't be afraid now that anybody will gain an ascendancy over the girl."

"But, Alec, what an introduction! For a girl with her possibilities to be written up like this——"

"You've got into the papers yourself," I reminded her.

"Hardly in the same connection," said Edith drily. "Of course, one who is socially prominent, especially during the war, when I was on all those committees, is unable to escape a certain amount of publicity. But that's different."

Yes, it was different. Edith was only forty, and reasonably good-looking. But even if she had ever walked on Broadway alone, she would have been safe from the cake-eater that walketh by night and the parlor snake that wasteth at noonday.

"Different in its expression," I objected, "not in its origin. Plenty of people give dinners and serve on committees without getting into the papers. What makes you news is what makes Hazel news—money. A girl of nineteen, with twenty million, is going to be news till she's married, and maybe afterward; no matter what she does."

"Then she mustn't do anything," said Edith firmly, "until she has a chance to get started right. Luckily nobody knows her yet; and nobody but you must have a chance to know her till I come back from China. You must keep a sharp eye on her, Alec. What was she doing, walking alone on Broadway, at her age?"

"Probably looking in the shop windows."

"That child alone, ready to succumb to the lure of temptation——"

"Vice is a monster of such pleasant mien as to be jumped for needs but to be seen," I suggested.

"Yes!" said Edith. "Precisely that, when one is young. Oh, I don't mean that vice has any attraction for you, Alec, any more than it ever had for me. We're Deuprees. But for ordinary young people—— You must be watchful, Alec. When you see her running into danger, don't hesitate to wave the red flag!"

Her face was tragic enough to impress anybody who didn't know what she was being tragic about; her agitation was sincere. I began to protest, and then gave it up. There was no use; I knew Edith too well. In her veins ran the blood of ten generations of preachers whose stock in trade was hell and damnation, whose method inclined to bold imagery and vivid dramatization of the struggles of the soul against sin. Edith hated the sensational newspapers, yet she usually thought in large red headlines, especially when she was thinking about morals. I couldn't argue with her; the tradition of her superiority was too firmly established. I could only go away.

But just as I was getting ready to tell her that I was going away, Miss Deming was announced.

"Oh, yes," Edith replied to my startled glance. "I asked her to lunch, too. We must lose no time with her."

If Edith hadn't been between me and the door I'd have lost no time with either of them. But before I could get out Hazel was in, and as soon as I saw her I decided to stay.

From the first glance I was in favor of Hazel; but it might as well be admitted that I liked her because she seemed—at the first glance—quite ordinary. She was as far from the fighting fury I'd read about in the papers as from the scared shrinking schoolgirl Edith had described. She looked just about like anybody else, except perhaps a little better; a slender brown-haired girl in a simple frock of leaf green, with dark green shimmering stockings; fresh and self-possessed, and moving with a catlike grace; but just an ordinary girl, whom I'd never have described as a dream of Heaven or a blue-eyed bearcat; especially as her eyes were hazel like her name, opaque green like a cat's, flickering now and then with some private amusement to which outsiders weren't invited.

Not till the ceremonial of introduction was over, and she was chatting with Edith, did I begin to realize that she wasn't like anybody else. There was something different. I didn't know what.

"Well," she observed cheerily to Edith, "I suppose you've seen the papers?"

With a groan Edith thrust at her the one I'd brought.

"Oh, I didn't see that one," said Hazel. "But they were all pretty lurid. Do you mind if I read this?"

And she read it, with a bubbling smile of honest

enjoyment, while Edith retreated to my chair and leaned on it for support.

I looked at Hazel again. Something queer about that curly brown hair—why, it was bobbed! The first bobbed hair I'd seen, on a girl of her class, in a year or more. Edith caught my glance——

“Isn't it aggravating!” she murmured, all but inaudibly. “*Nobody* wears bobbed hair any more. And the clothes——”

“What's the matter with them?” I whispered.

“They're last year's style—or year before. And new! She's deliberately had them made out of date.”

Why, so she had. None of the sweeping skirts and carried-around blouses of the season, but a plain frock falling straight from the shoulder to just below the knee—the sort of clothes they had worn two years ago, the sort they should never have stopped wearing, according to the uninformed masculine notion, unconcerned with the welfare of costumers. That is, the sort some of them should never have stopped wearing. This Hazel was wise; her plain frock enclosed a figure that could have found its place in the Follies; the skirt stopped short for the best of reasons. Them as has 'em wears 'em—if they dare.

“I tried to tell her,” Edith was whispering, “but she wouldn't listen.” Another point in Hazel's favor; I must ask her how she could help listening. . . . And with a chill of horror I realize that I was actually thinking of continuing this chance acquaintance, of learning to know this girl, of doing for my

own selfish pleasure all that I'd tried to refuse to do for Edith. What would become of Agnes? What would become of my book? . . .

Hazel looked up and Edith managed an appropriate groan.

"My poor child! Isn't it atrocious?"

"Why, no," said Hazel. "That was about the way it happened; except that of course my eyes aren't blue, and Mr. Levine sent me a bill for the window this morning."

"But why in the world did you——"

"Why, he was fresh," she explained, and seemed to think that that was explanation enough.

"But this publicity——"

"Oh, yes," said Hazel. "I told Sarah Whitlow it was no use her trying to fool the reporters. I must have dropped a card, or something, while I was powdering my nose after it was over. Why, Mrs. Torrey, what difference does it make? I don't do that sort of thing in the parlor, you know."

"I was afraid of this," Edith muttered. "It's fortunate you haven't met anybody yet——"

"You think people I haven't met, but might meet, would mind that?"

"My child, you don't understand——"

"I suppose not," said Hazel cheerfully. "Because we get all your New York scandal in the California papers, and I don't believe anybody is going to remember my beating up a masher with all the exciting things that are happening here all the time."

"Well, don't do it again, dear," Edith warned

her. "You must be careful—you can't be too careful. I shan't be here long, but Dr. Deupree——"

"Oh, yes," said Hazel, really looking at me for the first time. "He's going to show me the town, isn't he?"

"Indeed he is," said Edith.

Before I could deny it, we were summoned to lunch.

XII.

The Red Flag.

THE lunch was more successful than might have been expected, after this gloomy start. I noticed that Hazel was wearing the pin of the sorority to which I'd been loyal through four years of coeducation—Lucile's sorority. It appeared that she'd spent last year at Stanford, and knew two or three girls who had gone to college with me, now settled in California. So we talked with an ease that must have been gratifying to Edith, who finally interrupted us with—

"It's so fortunate that you two happened to meet to-day. Did I tell you, Alec? Harmon and I are going out to Southampton for a few days, to the Digbys'. Hazel was invited too, but she says she isn't accepting any invitations just now. So I'm going to leave her in your care while we're away. If you need any help, Hazel, don't hesitate to call on Dr. Deupree."

"You're very kind," said the terror of Times Square.

"I can't do much for the next ten days," I warned them. "There's a learned conference up in Westchester, at Maplecrest Inn. It begins to-morrow. I'm down for a speech on Monday night, but I'll have to stay clear through it—till the end of next week. After that——"

“You didn’t tell me anything about it,” said Edith severely. “I should have thought with your book and your other responsibilities you’d have had no time for such a thing. Really, Alec!”

“Well?” I said sulkily. “I’m not doing it for pleasure.”

“Then I should think you could merely go up—when is your speech—Monday?—and let it go on the other days. Especially since I’m going out of town.”

The hazel eyes were looking at me with a quite uninterpretable expression; but I guessed that this girl was wondering at my meekness; I raged at the ingrown habit that made me take Edith’s rebuke calmly; I felt a disturbing and unreasonable fear that Hazel would think I really preferred learning in Westchester to her company in New York. So I said, too rashly:

“I have to go, I tell you. I’ve been commissioned to keep an eye on a woman.”

Edith’s eyes widened in horror, Hazel tried to suppress a grin.

“I mean,” I added hastily, “a widow who’s been one of the chief benefactors of Wyndham College. Mrs. Clevenger. You remember father’s worries, Edith. This woman is quite a friend of the family, and of Dr. Goodhue; and he wants me to look after her—she doesn’t know her way about very well in the East——”

As usual, I’d said too much or too little; but I couldn’t say anything more.

"What a ridiculous idea!" said Edith. "As if you hadn't enough responsibilities——"

The green-eyed Hazel interrupted with cool cheerfulness:

"Well, don't count me a responsibility, Dr. Deupree. I'm not used to taking busy people's time. But I suppose it will be pretty ghastly for you, won't it, being nice to the old lady all week?"

I had a suspicion that she had spoken more truly than she knew, but I let her misunderstanding go uncorrected. There was no reason to suppose that either Edith or Hazel would ever meet Agnes, unless—unless—— Shying away from that perilous thought, I reflected that for the present the older my widow might seem the better.

So there was that, and all went so smoothly that when Edith presently excused herself to go to some committee meeting or other I proposed to walk home with Hazel to the Plaza. We strolled out into the bright June sunshine, across to Fifth Avenue, and down the broad shaded walk that borders the Park wall. Neither of us had anything to say at first, but it was like listening to a symphony merely to walk in silence beside that steely swinging body. She took off her hat and let the fluff of bobbed curls blow in the breeze. People looked at her hair, people looked at her clothes; but she didn't seem to care how they looked at her, or whether they looked at her. A noble serenity, a stoic calmness, may spring from twenty million dollars.

Then, three or four blocks north of the Plaza, she

sat down suddenly on a bench and beckoned me to a seat beside her.

"Well, let's get this straightened out," she suggested pleasantly. "Mrs. Torrey told you to keep an eye on me, didn't she?"

Realizing that this girl knew her own mind, I decided to tell the truth.

"Both eyes," I said. "Not that it strains them at all."

"If I ask for advice," said Hazel, "you're to give it. And if I don't ask for advice?"

"Woman," I said sternly, "I never promised to give you any advice. Now that I've seen you, and read about you in the papers, I'll—— But no. You don't need the one service I might be able to render."

"What's that?"

"Going bail for you."

The hazel eyes flickered.

"I guess we belong to the same lodge, don't we?" she decided. "What in the world did Mrs. Torrey tell you about me? Because what she told me about you made me think you were about sixty, with a long white beard——"

"She probably said I was dependable," I suggested gloomily.

Hazel grinned.

"That wasn't half of it."

"What else, then?"

The hazel eyes laughed into mine.

"Why, she told me that coming from the country,

I was sure to be dazzled by the glitter of the night life, and all that; she knew I would want to make a running jump right into it, so she felt it her duty to advise me not to go anywhere except with you . . .”

“Yes? Any more?”

She laughed.

“Because, Mrs. Torrey said, if you were with me—this was when she still thought I might come and live with her—if you were with me I could stay out till sunrise, and she’d know I was safe.”

“Why, damn her!” I growled. “And she gave me the impression that if you stayed out till sunrise with even me—even me—nobody would be safe.” Then we both grinned, and all was well.

“So now that we know the worst,” said Hazel, “shall we shake hands and part forever?”

Of course, that was what we ought to have done. I had Agnes on my mind, and my conference, and my book; not to mention Fan who wanted to see me happily married to some good woman a little duller than herself, and Fan’s sister who was just divorcing a drunken husband, and wanted somebody calm for a change. Why should I charge myself with the acquaintance of another woman?

I don’t know why, except that I was looking at Hazel, and Hazel was looking at me.

“We shan’t do anything of the kind,” I said in my most professorial tone. “I want to show you the town.”

“Well, isn’t that charming! Because I’ve been

wishing you would, if we could keep out of reach of Mrs. Torrey."

So that was settled.

"What do you want to see?" I asked her.

"Ah!" said Hazel darkly. "That's up to you. This is your town."

"People from California——" I began.

"Now, look here! I'm not people from California. Yes, I've lived there, but just now I live in New York. I've got money enough to live wherever I choose; and I choose to live here, at least till I see if it comes up to expectations."

"What are expectations?" I asked, with painful memories of Agnes.

"Why—you'll think I'm just a foolish kid, I suppose—but all I know of New York I've learned from O. Henry. I've been dragging Sarah Whitlow around with me to find the things he wrote about, but they don't seem to be here, any more."

"They're here," I said. "Not in the same places, not in the same form—but they'll always be here. Did you think the town would look the same, after fifteen years? Why, it doesn't look the same when you come back from summer vacation. It's always changing. But the more it changes, the more it stays the same underneath. I'll show you."

The Deupree conscience made a wild clutch at the coat tails of those good resolutions that were already sliding over the edge of the bottomless pit, but it was too late. There was something about this Hazel. She'd come all the way from the Pacific Coast to find the New York of O. Henry. She

couldn't find it without help, and she certainly ought to find it.

For I loved my town, and I loved those who love it. True New Yorkers are born, not made; born in California or North Carolina, in Odessa or Naples, in Chicago or Gopher Prairie—sometimes, even in New York.

Wherever born, wherever raised, they have only one home town. Whether in the uttermost parts of the earth or the nearest Long Island suburb, when they're off Manhattan Island, as certain also of their own poets have said, they're only camping out. Hazel had been born into this royal brotherhood—I could see that. It was my privilege to initiate her, and it would be an awful oversight to let anybody else beat me to the pleasure of showing her her town.

"We needn't lose any time, need we?" I asked her. "Suppose we start to-night—go to a theater, and dance a little afterward."

"Not to-night. I'm taking Sarah to the Follies to-night. You see, I'm educating Sarah. She's never been anywhere till she came here. I told her we ought to go to the first night of the Follies, but she put her foot down—said it was a wicked show, not having seen it. So I fooled her. I slipped out and got seats for the wildest, rawest show in town—one that she'd never heard of—sort of pushed her in over her head, you see, and made her swim. We've been taking the rest in our stride."

"You've seen a good many?" I asked, stirred by the revival of another care.

"All that are any good, and some that aren't."

"This lady I spoke of," I said. "The friend of my college. I have to take her to the theater tomorrow night. She likes problems and I like amusement. Do you happen to know anything that would suit both of us? And is—er—not likely to bring the blush of shame?"

Hazel looked at me obliquely.

"That's a good deal to ask," she observed. "However—maybe you'd like 'Groves of Ashtaroath.' It's about a preacher—religious problems, and all that. But there are some good lines."

"And a moral ending?" I demanded.

"Oh, very."

"Then I'll try it," I promised. "And here you are showing me the town already."

"But of course," she protested, "I can tell you about the shows. Don't they always tell us that New Yorkers never go to the theater—it's only the people from out of town?"

I didn't dare dispute that dogma.

"There are other things than theaters," I told her. "No, I don't mean the art museum and the Woolworth Building. I can show you——"

"Now don't think you have to ruin yourself buying me liquor at night clubs," she interrupted. "Yes, it's kind of you to think of it, but——"

"My dear girl, I had no such intention——"

"Why deny it?" said Hazel. "Every man under fifty wants to buy me liquor; it's the only way they can prove they're men of the world, now that everybody dresses so carelessly. Oh, I like it now and

then; but I passed through that phase when I was sixteen. And besides, it seems to me it's a waste of time to come to New York and see something you could see just as well back home."

There was much in that.

"And don't be afraid," she went on, "that I'll disgrace you with last year's clothes if you take me out anywhere. I can dress right up to the minute, if I have to. Only when I'm just dressing to suit myself, I like to wear the things I look best in. Or—yes, go on and say it; they all do—or out of."

"My dear child," I assured her, "I should never have dreamt of saying anything so obvious. They've spoiled you in California. But we'll attend to that."

It was hard, however, not to go on with the equally obvious comment that if all women looked like Hazel, those simple, scanty clothes of 1921 would never have gone out of style; that if all hair curled like hers, bobbed hair for women would still be as fashionable as the smooth shave for men. And she read my thought.

"Oh, yes," she agreed, "I can get away with it. But that isn't why I do it. I do it because father left me a lot of money. I can afford to wear clothes that are out of style—I'm only the eccentric Miss Deming. If I had to work for a living, I'd be that poor little dumbbell. I suppose you think I'm crude——"

"I think you're charming," I told her, "and beautiful, and natural. And in ten years you'll realize

just what an astounding compliment the combination of those three adjectives implies . . . But to think that Edith supposed you'd need protection——"

Hazel sniffed.

"To believe the papers, you'd think I'm really terrible, wouldn't you? That if I woke up with a grouch some morning, I'd go down and push the army off Governor's Island. Just because I'm pretty strong, and dad taught me how to box and to take care of myself."

"But," I explained, "we don't take care of ourselves here. We leave that to the police."

"Where were the police when that poor little shrimp tried to pick me up? If your ravening wolves of the wicked city are no better than that, I don't need a bodyguard, do I? . . . Come on. Let's walk."

I didn't like this turn to the conversation. For after all I wear spectacles, and am not regarded as a strong-arm man. I began to think that while Hazel might accept me as a guide, she'd look for somebody more primitive and warlike when she wanted a playmate. And I didn't like that.

We strolled down the Avenue through a section covered with loose planking, where tool shanties blocked the view on every side, and the rattle of drills boring through rock in the new subway cut, came up from beneath our feet. This particular section of New York looked, for the moment, like a mushroom mining town—the sort of place in which

Hazel was at home, and I wasn't. I couldn't help the childish feeling that to this woman I was only an Eastern mollicoddle.

"You wrong our city," I protested. "There are doubtless men on this decadent Atlantic seaboard, who could pick you up and carry you off under one arm. But we don't do it. Life here is tame and peaceable——"

My remark was cut in two by a banging blast in the cut below us. The loose planking beneath our feet swayed and clattered and gave way. We fell, the plank roadway falling three inches ahead of us; through a crack in the boards I looked down into a cut forty feet deep. We were gone . . .

And my slow subconscious mind told me, as we tumbled, that I had seen a grimy man waving a red flag ahead of us, a moment before the explosion. But I hadn't noticed him. I hadn't waved the red flag at Hazel; I hadn't even noticed somebody else waving the red flag, when Hazel was with me. Edith, and my pious ancestors, would have called that a Sign . . .

Then my tumble ended abruptly, and I was mashed between something hard and solid that I'd dropped into, and something heavy that had dropped into me.

For an instant I lay breathless, quite devoid of thought. Then I realized that I wasn't dead, that perhaps I wasn't even badly hurt. Moreover, the heavy object that had slid into me as my descent was checked was twisting about, now, with a hand on my shoulder. It was Hazel. We'd rolled into a

heap of planking and picks and shovels—the wreck of a tool shanty—caught between a projecting spur of hard, unbroken rock and the wall of the excavation. Beside us, hardly a foot away, our ledge dropped off into the cut. Above, I could see a flat cake of cement sidewalk from which the supporting earth had fallen away, teetering unsteadily just over our heads.

Yet we weren't dead; we were hardly more than eight feet below the surface; and through the choking clouds of dust, drifting up from the depths, I could see the outthrust limb of a tree hanging above us. Somehow that leafy bough encouraged me.

Meanwhile, Hazel had got her knee out of my side—only a real athlete could have done it in that position; and lying half supine beside me she raised her head and smiled.

“Resuming our argument,” she said, “you were just observing that life in New York is tame and peaceable——”

Though the full nervous shock hadn't struck me yet, I was scared enough. But it wouldn't do to show it, when she was so calm.

“We don't count things like this,” I said irritably. “We're always having to build new subways, and every now and then a street drops into one of them—one of the incidents of progress. We're lucky a taxi didn't drop on us, or a Fifth Avenue bus. That is—you're not hurt, are you?”

“Oh, not a bit. Neither hurt nor offended. I came to see the life, and I suppose this is it.”

“Yes,” I recalled, “Edith was afraid you'd want

to look at the underworld. Well, you'll never have a better chance."

"Mostly sewer pipes and cables, what I can see from here," she commented cheerfully. "Not very alluring. But——"

The sheet of paving above us tipped, trembled, and broke loose—a dozen square yards of it. Hazel's fingers dug into my shoulder as it clattered past with a great rumble, leaving us dustier than ever, but untouched. Above sounded many footsteps, and the clang of approaching gongs.

"If you call this tame——" she muttered.

Well, here we were, the hero and heroine in the conventional desperate predicament, and probably I was expected to do something.

"I suppose," I said grumpily, "that your friends on the coast would find this a good chance for some strong-arm rescue work—a little Fairbanks stuff. Well, I'd try it, if it were the last hope; but the best thing we can do is to lie still. Here in New York we let the Fire Department pull us out."

"I'll wait for them," she promised. And within two or three minutes they had pulled us out, or at least let down a ladder up which Hazel scrambled with ease, while I managed to follow as a point of honor. Then we were on the sidewalk, in a group of policemen and firemen and ambulance surgeons, with a crowd already massing behind police lines on the Avenue and the cross streets.

I took Hazel's elbow.

"Let's get out of the crush," I proposed. And in a minute or two we were out of it—out of it, and

through the crowd, and down in the cool shaded walks of the Park. But not before a policeman had stopped us and demanded our names.

Hazel faced him with a shrug.

"No use faking this time," she sighed. "My name's Hazel Deming. I live there at the Plaza. And this"—she didn't intend to let me speak for myself—"this is John Smith, of San Francisco."

"If Edith sees that in the paper," I told her when we were by ourselves in the Park, dusting off our clothing and trying to pretend our pulse wasn't much above normal, "she'll wonder how I lost you so soon."

"Let her wonder. It will do her good. But it *is* hard luck just the same. Things always happen to me; I don't hunt trouble . . . Well—where do we go from here?"

"I thought we might walk a little," I suggested inanely, afraid to admit that my nerves were still shaky.

"Better not. Sarah Whitlow will be half crazy. I'm due home from Mrs. Torrey's, and she thinks I've been kidnapped whenever I've been an hour out of her sight. You see, Sarah got a bad start in New York. The first day we were here she was knocked down by an automobile hearse on its way to a funeral, and she didn't like the way the mourners looked out of the taxi windows and laughed at her. She thinks this is a wicked town. I thought what I did to the masher would cheer her up, but all she got out of that was another proof of the pitfalls in the way of innocence. Considering that last

year I lived in a sorority house, and could do more or less as I pleased, it gets on the nerves sometimes. But I have to have somebody with me."

"I hope she won't mistake me for a pitfall in the way of innocence," I suggested. "I want to show you some of our local sights—above street level."

"Well, you get your learned conference off your mind first. Did you say you're going to make a speech?"

"I am, worse luck."

"Can anybody come and hear you?"

Anybody could, of course; but I'd have my hands full with Agnes, at that conference.

"Why, yes," I admitted, "but it would bore you to death."

"Maybe not. You see, I haven't got over the shock of finding you aren't old and gray. I'm curious to see what makes people pretend you're old and gray."

"The conference is up in Westchester," I said, "a good way from town."

"Well, I could drive up. My car isn't much good—a two-year-old roadster; but I'm going to buy one of these new Sagamores as soon as I get around to it."

Here was a golden chance to change the subject.

"I know the head of the Sagamore agency here," I told her. "Man named Bonner. His place is just over here on Broadway. Shall we walk over and take a look?"

Hazel stared at me, then broke into hysterical laughter.

“Thank goodness! You’re stalling too. Here I’ve been talking away as hard as I could, so you wouldn’t think I was rattled—just to keep up with you; and you’re as bad as I am. If you think we could walk on Broadway—— Look at yourself. Or look at me—I suppose I’m as bad.”

There was a black smudge across her forehead; the green frock was torn and stained.

“This must be a queer town,” she remarked, “if you’re so used to falling into holes that you’ve forgotten it already. If we walked out into Broadway, we’d draw a crowd that would stop the traffic. Here—it’s only two steps to the Plaza. Come up to my apartment and clean up. Sarah will want to meet you, anyway.”

And I wanted to meet Sarah; for Edith had told me to fire her. It didn’t seem probable that anybody had told Sarah to fire me, yet when she first looked at me I felt that I was not only fired, but permanently obliterated. Sarah was tall and gaunt and weatherbeaten, with gold-rimmed spectacles masking chill gray eyes that played over Hazel and me with icy disapproval.

“You’ve been fightin’ again,” she said grimly. “But why do you bring him home with you? Turn him over to the police, like the other one.”

“No fights to-day,” said Hazel cheerfully. “This is Mrs. Torrey’s cousin, Dr. Deupree. We fell into the subway.”

“You look it,” said Sarah, clutching my hand and holding on till she had satisfied herself that her grip

was stronger. "Now go and clean yourselves up; you look disgraceful."

When I had duly cleaned up in one of the twelve bathrooms, she managed to keep me feeling disgraceful. She led the conversation, and I gathered that she held me personally responsible not only for Hazel's mishap but for the methods of subway construction, the dangers of metropolitan life, and the generally lowered character of the age. Here was one woman who didn't trust me—that was sure. She managed to spoil the call pretty completely; but when I left I was repaid by Hazel's rueful comradely smile as she took my hand at the door.

"She's a dragon, isn't she? But she's really a dear. Dragon to strangers, watchdog at home."

"Tell her not to growl when she sees me coming," I urged. "I'm safe."

"I don't believe you," said Hazel through the closing door.

XIII.

Agnes Treads the Primrose Path.

BONNER came in as I was at breakfast on Thursday morning—Bonner in a dressing gown of crimson silk, edged with gold braid, his chubby, fresh-shaved face glittering with a high pink finish, his brow puckered with gloom.

“I saw your prospect,” he began.

“Which prospect?” I inquired. “I have several prospects.”

“The one you tipped me off to. The fat dame from Indianapolis.”

“Already? Did you sell her?”

“Yes, already. . No, I didn’t sell her.” He sat down, lit a cigarette, and looked at me with a degree of aloofness—almost of resentment.

“Doc, is this woman a friend of yours?”

“Yes.”

“All right. We’ll forget all about it.”

“What is there to forget about?” I demanded, feeling that friendship has its limits.

“I see. It ain’t gone so far, yet. Well, Doc, you better take your time. Plenty of it.”

“What did she do to you?”

“Doc, she broke my heart. It’s been years since I’ve tried to sell anybody myself; running the office

is job enough. But since this woman was a friend of yours, I thought I'd take about fifty dollars' worth of time yesterday afternoon and see what I could do with her. So I called her up, and she seemed agreeable, and I asked her if I couldn't run over to the Ritz and talk to her."

"The Ritz?" I repeated. "You've got the wrong woman. The Mrs. Clevenger I spoke of is at the Martha Washington."

"Yes, that's the one. She was at the Martha Washington yesterday morning, but by afternoon she'd moved to the Ritz."

"Darwin was right," I murmured. "Yes, yes—you called her at the Ritz. Go on."

"Well, she was pretty busy, it seemed, but I finally wheedled her into lettin' me come around and show her the new limousine. She had me pick her up at one of these gold-mounted costumers in the Fifties, and I will say, Doc, that you've got the eye. Blewie! What a woman! Built like the Goddess of Liberty. And if she didn't start buyin' clothes till after you phoned me the other day, why, all I can say is, she moves fast.

"Well, out we went over the Queensboro Bridge, and when we got out the other side of Jamaica I asked if she liked speed. Sure she liked speed. So I'd got up to about forty-eight when she grabbed me by the shoulder—nearly spilled us—and told me to slow down. 'This car's good for seventy-five,' I tell her. 'If you go faster than twenty again,' she says, 'I'll scream.' Well, so it went. For every boost I give the car she's got a come-back.

"Not a peep about the price, Doc—and I don't mind tellin' you that we make a little money on that car; but a kick about everything that makes the price. It's too big; too fast; too comfortable. She says that all this is unnecessary; it's foolish."

"You rushed her too much," I said. "She had a relapse."

"Maybe so. Anyway, I kidded her back to good humor, and she finally said she'd take another look at Sagamores before she bought anything else. Said I could give her another afternoon. *I* could. Huh! Think I'd waste another afternoon on her? Next time, one of my bright young men draws the assignment of hearing what a rotten car we make. And yet, Doc—when we come back, she asks me to drop her at Papineau's."

"Papineau's? What's that?"

"You know—the jewelers. Big and new and flashy, and prices according. Gets all the movie trade, and so on."

Jewels! I hadn't foreseen that. Agnes was going in for spending her money in earnest—perhaps in too much earnest.

"She'll buy a car," I predicted. "She's just beginning to spend money on herself—doesn't know how, yet. But she'll learn. And she has plenty of it——"

"Doc, I don't care how much money she's got or how good she looks—that woman is a hick by nature. Believe one who knows. I've seen 'em before, the ones that got rich; and it makes no difference. Born a hick always a hick. God Almighty made

that woman to ride in a spring wagon, and if she was worth eighty million it wouldn't make any difference. I know her."

"Do you?" I asked abstractedly. "I thought I knew her—once. She's not so simple."

"Simple? Of course she ain't simple. None of 'em are simple. But what has that got to do with my seein' through her? There's lots of things about—oh, well, say chemistry—that I don't know. I never went to college. I don't know why gasoline vapor explodes when you shoot a spark into it; but I know it does, and that's all I need to know in my end of the business. Same with women.

"Now, Doc, you're a good guy, but you've always got your nose in some book, and you don't know some little things that kind of come to a man with my experience. I know all kinds of women, and there's no kind I'd sooner lay off of than this one. I said the other night you'd better marry her. I take it back. She'd have her foot on your neck every minute. The millions may look pretty good at a distance, Doc, but take it from one who knows, you'll sell your soul if you wed that dame."

I rubbed my neck with anticipatory tenderness. Yes, it would probably be an easy cushion for Agnes's chubby foot. But what of that? I'd lost all illusions about my relations with women. If they found it easy to play me for a sucker, even in bachelorhood, why should the practice be abandoned afterward? Any woman I might marry would plant her foot on my neck. She'd have to; I could never respect a wife so weak or stupid that she couldn't

rule me. No, my only salvation lay in not getting married; or if that proved impossible, in marrying a woman who could offer compensations for the inevitable foot.

But that was remote . . .

"We're not thinking of getting married," I said. "Neither of us. We're only friends, and I'm showing her the town. And—Bonner! I'm taking her out to-night."

"Where?"

"You'll have to tell me where. Good food if possible, but she won't care so much about the food. There must be a lot of——"

"Atmosphere?"

"No, not exactly atmosphere. Front. Hauteur. For instance, everybody must be in evening dress."

Bonner scratched his head.

"Well, there's plenty of places like that," he said. "I tell you—— She'd probably like one of these Russian places. Russian decorations, Russian music, Russian food—very much the style, for people from out of town. Run by refugee aristocrats, you know. The hat-check boys are all generals, the waitresses are all princesses, and so on. At least, so they say."

"And everybody in evening dress?"

"Well, no. You'd see a lot of plain clothes."

"And these generals," I pursued. "Do they wear their uniforms? Do the princesses wear crowns, or anything like that?"

"They wear some damn kind of costumes, but no crowns; no uniforms that look like generals to me."

"Then it won't do." For if I knew Agnes, she'd prefer a mere waitress who looked like a princess to a princess who looked like a mere waitress.

"All right, Doc; I tell you the place for her. You go to the Select Club."

"But if it's a club," I protested, "we couldn't get in. Especially a select club."

"Club hell! It's as much of a club as Childs'. You phone for a reservation, and slip the head waiter five when you get your table. They'll do the rest of the clubbing. But you'll have to bring your own liquor, Doc. Why should they give up a percentage to the police when they can make as much money sellin' you White Rock for your highballs at five bones a bottle, and orange juice for your cocktails at two-fifty a glass?"

"Oh, she doesn't drink," I said hastily, thanking my luck that she didn't.

"Then after the theater," I went on, "I'll have to hunt up a night club, with some sort of show."

"Well, there's plenty of them, and no trouble about getting in. Why, Doc, you know those dumps as well as I do."

"I did before prohibition," I confessed, "but I can't stand the prices, now. Outside of an occasional hotel dance, my gang has done most of its merry-making in its own apartments in the last few years. We can buy gin for an evening for less than the cover charge at these after-theater cafés."

"You certainly can. Well, look here! No reason why you should have to sell your Liberty bonds just to show this woman what's open after dark. The

best of these night clubs is the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Livest, snappiest, best-dressed, stays open longest, wildest show——”

“And most expensive,” I conjectured gloomily. “Well, I can stand it, for once.”

“No need to stand it. I’ll give you a card to Sylvain, the head waiter. My entertainment account there runs two or three thousand a month; and I gave Sylvain a rake-off on his car last week. My card will save you the cover charge, and what you might have to slip him; and it will get you a little rum——”

“I don’t want any rum, when I’m with Mrs. Clevenger.”

“Well, Doc, tastes are different. I don’t mind tellin’ you that after I’d spent a couple of hours with her I came back to the office and took one long hooker of straight Scotch. I needed it. It’s women like her that make rum a necessity.”

But that, of course, was only Bonner’s prejudice. She’d knocked his car. I, as the day wore on, found myself tingling with excitement; Agnes made the anticipatory cocktail that I’d intended to mix entirely unnecessary. After all, I knew what a cocktail would do; but Agnes was a mystery. So I strolled into the Ritz, about half-past six, with tickets for “Groves of Ashtaroth” in my vest pocket, clad in evening dress and the corresponding habit of mind, and trying to wear that expression blended of pathetic wistfulness and aristocratic contempt that John Barrymore carries better than I do. I was announced; Mrs. Clevenger sent word

that she would be down immediately. I sat down, and waited twenty minutes with rising spirits. Punctuality had been one of Agnes's rustic vices, but she was learning.

At the end of the twenty minutes a flunkey whose uniform would have aggrandized a grand duke sneaked up to me and whispered a request that I go up to Mrs. Clevenger's suite. Suite! I went up, was admitted by a maid, and waited in the drawing-room for some minutes more. Through a door that was just ajar I could hear voices—Agnes's voice, and the respectful murmur of two or three more maids. Night before last, Agnes had dressed herself; but now dressing her had become skilled labor.

Then, at last, she came out.

I swallowed several exclamations. This wasn't the Agnes we had known at Wyndham College. Agnes, trimly corseted; Agnes, with her fluffy waved hair arrayed about her head like a helmet of hammered gold; Agnes, whose maids had powdered her without letting it show, on face and neck and shoulders.

Shoulders? Yes!—shoulders, to say the least. She was gowned in pale blue brocade, cut low enough in front; but as she entered she turned to give some order to the maids behind her, and I could only gasp again. Her gown had no back at all. It was voluminous enough to swathe Agnes in her old original pre-war style, but most of the material fluttered in draperies or trailed behind her in a long train. About her ankles it gathered discreetly, but not so

discreetly that I couldn't see stockings of cobwebby blue silk, and about twenty dollars' worth of brocade slipper per foot.

I appreciated the delicacy of the thought that had led her to turn so that I could see the worst at once; but now she had turned again, and was coming toward me with an appeal in her eyes. Appeal is too mild a word; it was a requisition. She wanted two things: abject, instant idolatry was one of them; but before that, she wanted to be told by somebody she knew—by a Deupree—that she hadn't committed the Unpardonable Sin, that she wasn't a Scarlet Woman.

So I caught her hands with the most adoringly deferential manner I could accomplish and whispered:

“You wonderful creature! If anybody had told me that a woman could dress in the perfection of the mode and still look like an angel of purity—Why, you're the most beautiful woman in New York!”

And she was, pretty nearly; especially when she blushed, and whispered with a precautionary nod at the maids:

“Not so loud. They'll hear you.”

So she felt that we shared a Guilty Secret. Well, that was all right, so far as it went. My only hope was that now that the grand transformation scene had been accomplished she wouldn't forget who had made her what she was to-night.

Then one of the maids brought up a silken cloak, collared and hemmed in fur, and I took it away from

the girl and slipped it over Agnes's shoulders. As my fingers brushed her skin I felt that she was trembling. Poor girl! Her naked soul could have faced its Maker on the judgment day with a good deal of composure; but when she laid bare those alabaster shoulders she must have felt very, very nude.

"So you think it's all right?" she asked nervously. "I asked you up so you could tell me if you thought I'd better put on something more conservative——"

"Why be conservative, Mrs. Clevenger? Let us have an evening of liberalism."

"Oh, yes, by all means. I'm really quite liberal in my sympathies. So you think it will do? How nice! Shall we—— Goodness! Cecile! I almost forgot the jewels."

She flung off the cloak and vanished into the bedroom, and when she reappeared there was still another Agnes. That fatal dinner at the Biltmore! Those demoralizing women from Detroit! Agnes had dressed up to them once more. Her arms were no longer bare; the bracelets on either of them, the jewels flashing in the rings on either hand, would have completed the memorial gateway to Broadus Wheelock of the class of '84. The rope of pearls about her neck would have bought our college a new women's dormitory. Nothing in Detroit could touch her, except the Community Christmas Tree.

"Are you going to wear all those out in public?" I asked. "We ought to hire a bodyguard."

"Oh, not really? I feel sure you can protect me, Dr. Deupree."

If she felt that way, what could I do? Anyhow,

she deserved a party as a reward for all this grandeur. I could have done a good deal better than the Select Club, from my point of view; it occupied a basement and first floor in an old brownstone house, and beyond doubt it had been only a seventy-five-cent red-wine table d'hôte before prohibition. Yet the food was pretty good, though not worth what it cost; everybody was in evening dress; there were palms and flask parties and merriment. It was the sort of scene you see in the three-color inserts in the magazine advertising sections, recommending a brand of cigarettes. Agnes was quite thrilled. Probably, of course, most of the people around us were bootleggers, or bucket-shop brokers out on bail; I couldn't imagine anybody else able and willing to pay so high for what they got. But so long as they were all in evening dress they looked like the cream of the plutocracy to Agnes. After dinner we lingered a little while the orchestra played melodies from the current Follies, and I smoked a cigar, and Agnes contemplated the crowd with the comfortable certainty that she was not only the most virtuous and high-minded, but the best dressed woman in the house.

More thrills in the theater lobby, more envious and gratifying stares from other women. Then we were in our seats, and looking over the programs.

"'Groves of Ashtaroath,'" said Agnes. "I presume from the title that the play deals with a Scriptural, or at least a religious, theme."

"I believe the hero is a clergyman," I observed. And sure enough, there it was at the top of the cast

of characters: *The Reverend James Dunwald*, played by Mr. Osric Mathison.

"I am glad to see that the modern drama deals with such serious characters," she said. "I am ashamed to say that I have seen nothing more recent than 'Ben-Hur.' "

I looked farther down the program, and a cold chill trickled down my spine when I perceived that while Mr. Osric Mathison's name was in small type, capitals were required for that of Miss Dolores Duvetyne, who played *Tamar Thorpe*. I turned over the page. It seemed that Act I was in *The Rev. Mr. Dunwald's* study; Act II in *The Rev. Mr. Dunwald's* bedroom; Act III in a courtroom; Act IV in the study, once more.

Silently I cursed California and all who came from there. Hazel would have her little joke.

And yet, Agnes liked "Groves of Ashtaroath"—liked it more than I did, though it was at least two thousand years more recent than "Ben-Hur."

There were lines, incidentally—the lines Hazel had mentioned; acid and flashing lines. But they went right over Agnes's golden head, and over most other heads as well. It was evident that the author at some time had been extremely annoyed by a clergyman. But he was a prudent man; he had thrown in the lines for himself and the critics, and for the audience he had concocted a fable in the most moral manner, leading up to a conclusion that must have satisfied ninety-nine out of every hundred cash customers. A wise man, this author; he knew that bedroom farces had gone out. But he knew that the

public, this year, happened to be in a frame of mind which made the material of bedroom farce highly profitable, if employed to illustrate a moral lesson.

A broker in a bedroom, the simple hero of years past, was out of date; people were used to thinking of brokers in bedrooms. But a clergyman in a bedroom—that was always new. The audience was convulsed with merriment when Miss Dolores Duvetyne said “damn,” it wept when she was brought into court on grave charges; and it wept and hurrahed and stopped the show with hand-clapping when *The Reverend James Dunwald*, just before being gathered into the arms of the pure woman who had loved him all through the play, delivered a long speech about how his mind had been broadened and his sympathies deepened by his recent, but now definitely concluded, affair with *Tamar Thorpe*. All in all, it was a great moral show; Agnes wept and applauded as hard as anybody.

“Wasn’t it fine?” she asked brokenly as the players were taking their calls and the playgoers were hunting their hats. “A very strong play, of course, but broadening. Elevating. Of great cultural value . . . Oh, don’t throw away the program; there was something I wanted you to put down for me, if you have a pencil. Let me see—gowns, hats—here it is. Negligee worn by Miss Duvetyne in Act II, by Gracilette et Cie. There!”

There, indeed.

“You’ll go to supper?” I asked as we moved toward the door.

“Of course,” said Agnes in a worldly tone. “I

thought we'd settled that. Besides, I'm terribly hungry."

I made a last effort to reduce the tension.

"If you're hungry we'd better go to one of the hotels. No shows, except music and dancing; but the food is better."

Agnes thought it over as we got our taxi.

"No," she said, "I've seen the hotels. I think I should like to go to Rector's."

"Rector's?" I gasped.

"Well, I've heard so much about it. Why—don't you know where it is?"

"I know where it was," I told her. "It was right over there across the street, on the Broadway corner."

Her eyes followed my gesture to a line of winking red fire, an electric sign blazing at us in serpentine letters:

DE LUXE TWO-PANTS SUITS
AT ONE-PANTS PRICES

"That," I said, "is on the site of Rector's. It's a symbol."

"Oh, dear," she said. "I mean, How fortunate. Well, Dr. Deupree, of course I'm in your hands. But my feeling is this—when such places are a part of the problem one is studying, we who are striving for the better cannot be restrained by a feeling of mistaken prudery——"

"Driver!" I called. "To the Hanging Gardens of Babylon!"

I knew the Hanging Gardens only by reputation

—the reputation of the most popular and liveliest of after-theater cafes, and the only one which dared, for reasons best known to those charged with the enforcement of the law, to stay open till daybreak. Its exterior was Babylonian enough for any taste—two huge winged human-headed bulls in stucco flanking the door, with a pot of something that was probably only spotlighted steam, but looked like smoldering incense, above. Not being very Babylonian, I approached with the shyness befitting an impecunious scholar, and an unreasonable conviction that once upon a time I'd been here before. But Agnes wasn't shy. She descended into the midst of a crowd of customers disembarking from limousines in the splendor of silk hats and evening cloaks, went upstairs with the crowd in majestic calm, and paused on the carpeted landing to hand me her cloak and look herself over—look at her back—in the wall mirror. Then she went on with a satisfied sigh. She belonged.

The field marshal or drum major at the door looked at us with a frown and asked if we had a reservation. We hadn't, but we had Bonner's card. The military man frowned again and sent for an imposing person who turned out to be no less than Sylvain himself. Sylvain seemed worried about something, but he treated Bonner's card with intense respect; and after whispered conferences with two or three other functionaries he led us, in person, to a table in the balcony.

"Sorry you were held up, sir. We were expecting a little trouble to-night, and the man at the door

exceeded his instructions. It won't happen again, sir. Any friend of Mr. Bonner's——"

So he left us in the hangingest of the Hanging Gardens; for the balcony, we gathered, was the resort of persons of real distinction. The mere rich sat down below, at tables around the edge of the dancing floor; but those who were not only rich, but known to the house as rich, sat in the balcony and looked down on the heads of the commoners.

There were more Babylonian monsters indoors—winged bulls, winged lions, wreathed in flowers and ferns; and the border of the balcony was partitioned off by shoulder-high banks of shrubbery into little alcoves, each large enough for a single table. Agnes and I could see each other in the flattering half light of the rose-shaded table lamp; we could see, dimly, the man at the next table, blinking impassively through the smoke of his cigarette; but the rest of the crowd was a mere blur of shirt fronts and shoulders. In the dusk below us couples crept and bumped about the overcrowded dancing floor, to the lewd squeals of saxophones and the rhythmic thump of drums. Old stuff, but all new to Agnes.

"I suppose they're dancing very improperly, down there in the dark," she suggested.

"Maybe not," I ventured. "When I was at Wyndham we used to turn out the lights for the last waltz, but more to pretend we were devilish than to be devilish."

She looked hurt, at that; it wouldn't do to rob her of any illusions about impropriety. So I pressed the bill of fare into her hands, and she

thought she would have some green turtle soup, and a filet mignon, and some salad, and a biscuit Torton. Then she turned the card over, to the wine list on the back. Even Agnes, however, could guess that these drinks with strange names at champagne prices were only cider and grape juice in disguise.

"Would you like a soft drink?" I asked.

"Oh, no. Their prices are absurd. I have no objection to spending money, but I think one should always get one's money's worth—don't you?"

"Quite true, Mrs. Clevenger."

"And yet——" said Agnes, hesitant.

And yet—— Waiters were scurrying past us, carrying mysterious chubby bottles with wired corks; in the dim light we could see these same bottles, swathed in napkins, being deposited with care in shiny buckets full of ice. Corks popped . . .

"These wines and liquors must have a terrible fascination," she sighed. "It seems that people will have them, despite the law. And so openly——"

"Nobody has to drink them," I interrupted. She looked at me over the rose lamp with the puckered eyebrows and pursed lips of the original Eve.

"Oh, of course I understand that. But I don't want to impose any constraint upon you, Dr. Deupree. You are a man of the world; you are accustomed to wine. I have no wish to be prudish or puritanical; order your champagne, if you must have it."

"I can live without it," I observed bitterly. "And in view of your position on such matters, Mrs. Clevenger——"

"Oh, I don't want you to consider that at all," she

insisted. "I—if you feel that way about it, I should even be willing to—to join you in a—a toast to New York, if you like. This is your town."

She was looking at me with cold blue eyes, the eyes of a woman who doesn't intend to be disappointed in her man of the world. She sat in non-chalant ease, half turned in her chair, one plump arm on the table; her reasonably draped bosom toward me, for we had known each other back home, and the dictates of modesty called for that; but her undraped back, to the eyes of the strangers on the lower floor, must have thrust up over the balcony rail like a tower of marble.

Amazing woman!—built like the Goddess of Liberty, and dressed—so it must have seemed from the other side—like the Venus di Milo. Here she was; she believed in spending money, but not unless one got one's money's worth. She wouldn't understand how I could spend my money merely to watch other people break the law. She was cold; she was firm. A memorial gateway glittered on the fingers of the hand hung over the railing; a women's dormitory glowed about her throat. If I failed her now, Wyndham College would fail with me; Agnes might put all her money into jewels instead of good works. It was my town, and my party; I must deliver.

And yet, she'd never taken a drink in her life. If she took one—even one—now, I might have to take her away in an ambulance. And if I took one, or more, anything that might annoy her in my conduct, through the rest of the evening, would be ascribed to the fumes of liquor.

“Well?” she said abruptly. “Why are you so cross?”

I straightened up and managed a smile.

“Waiter!” I called. He came, and evidently Sylvain had instructed him. I whispered to him, at some length. He disappeared, came back with a shiny bucket full of ice, two glasses, and a bottle. A cork popped, and a golden liquid danced and bubbled in the hollow stems of the glasses.

“I hope nobody from Indianapolis is here,” she whispered nervously.

“But,” I pointed out as we raised our glasses, “it’s so dark they couldn’t recognize you, anyway.”

“How true that is!” She touched her lips to the glass, sputtered, set it down, then raised it again.

“Well, Dr. Deupree—what is it one says?—here’s how.”

XIV.

Fall of Babylon, and Relief of Indianapolis.

AGNES was having the time of her life. Until a week ago she'd considered it wasteful and foolish to wear even decently made clothes; to dine at expensive restaurants, no matter how respectable; to stay out after dark, except for church or a welfare meeting. She had looked on New York from afar, with dread and awe and virtuous disapproval and horrified fascination. Now she was in the heart of the new Sodom, viewing the licentious whirl, getting her first look at the sort of thing she'd been taught to associate with Nero and Belshazzar; and better dressed and better looking than any other woman in the room. And all with the highest of motives—to broaden her education, to fit herself for a wider usefulness.

But I wasn't so happy. My tastes weren't Babylonian; I'd got all the Babylon out of my system years ago. Worse yet, the Deupree conscience was beginning to take up its bed and walk. This beautiful woman was my own creation, and creation meant responsibility.

Of course she'd feel undying gratitude to the man who had made her beautiful; and gratitude, interacting with the deference and admiration that I'd

shown her in all honesty—— Creations usually fell in love with their creators, in fiction and mythology at least. Galatea fell in love with Pygmalion; the gypsy waif, educated and given a station in life by the benevolent gentleman of middle age, requited her benefactor with a tender affection that solaced the declining years; the clubman shipwrecked on the desert island married the wild girl of irreproachable family connections, who had lived there since the great wreck when she was a mere child. It was inevitable. To be sure, the monster didn't fall in love with Frankenstein; but this exception was not encouraging.

Why in the world had I, of all men, been so mad as to awaken a soul—a soul that had been put to sleep by its Creator, no doubt for the most cogent of reasons, and would have slumbered peacefully till the resurrection morn but for me? It had been a piece of June folly, inspired by the mad desire to kiss Mrs. Clevenger. Well, she was kissable enough now. Somebody would have to kiss her before long, if only for her own good. And she was no fool; she was probably expecting it. Perhaps to-night!

Well—earlier in the evening, I had thought of kissing her to-night. But I couldn't go through with it. I didn't want to marry Agnes. I didn't want to marry anybody; I was horribly afraid of marriage, now that I dragged the idea out into the open. It would upset my habits; it would expose me to the companionship of a woman, and I had no enthusiasm for women just now. And certainly I didn't want

to marry a woman with millions; I couldn't live up to them.

But I couldn't kiss Agnes if I didn't intend to ask her to marry me. Agnes had never flirted; it wouldn't be fair. Nor safe. Flirting with Agnes would be something like flirting with a ton of dynamite. I had underestimated this woman. Everybody had underestimated her. Under the stare of those cold blue eyes, before we got our bottle, I had begun to understand why Zaccheus married her. It was no senile longing of December for May; Agnes's fleshly charms had been negligible when she married, negligible when she was widowed—negligible, Heaven forgive me, till I had told her she was beautiful. No; Zaccheus, the iron man, the hard-boiled stove maker, had recognized a kindred soul. I didn't dare to kiss her.

But could I help it? We had had a glittering worldly party; she would expect a stormy emotional finish. I would kiss her; she would be angry; she would weep. She would say, "Oh, Doctor Deupree, how could you?"

But if I didn't kiss her, she'd wonder how I couldn't. The influence I'd won by persuading her to dress up to New York, the influence that could be retained only by spending money, putting on dress clothes, and buying drinks that bubbled in hollow-stemmed glasses—that influence would wither if I let the chance go by. What would become of our college? What would become of Agnes? It was unreasonable to suppose that this radiant beauty who was beginning, as Goodhue had put it, to

branch out, would remain unknissed very long. If I didn't do it, somebody would. Perhaps Gushmore!

She caught my eye, smiled, and raised her glass again. I did the same, as beseemed a man of the world. Being a man of the world came hard, to me; looking like a man of the world, thanks to the uniform of evening dress, was a little easier. But I couldn't do it so well as the solitary man at the next table—a man whom I began to notice only when I saw that he was noticing us. Looking at us—no, not at us; he was looking at Agnes.

For a moment I thought he must be somebody from Indianapolis; his eyes roved over her with bold confidence, caught her eyes—— She stirred uneasily, lifted a shoulder, and looked away. Why, he was trying to flirt with her—trying to pick her up! Her evening was complete. For this gentleman was one whose attention ought to have flattered any lady. He was bald-headed and red-faced—not the bright red of temporary excitement, but the burnt-in mahogany of habitual sin. His pop eyes stared out of wrinkled purses of loose skin; his black mustache was long, and waxed to a sharp point; he wore a gold-rimmed monocle on a broad black ribbon. A man of the world. Probably, of course, he was only a haberdasher, or a dealer in investment securities; but he looked like one who spent his time rebuking ambassadors, and seducing duchesses, and lighting cigarettes on the terrace at Monte Carlo. Final proof, perhaps, of his sophistication—he dared to sit alone and drink mineral water when all around him were buying wine for expensive women. And Agnes

—our Agnes—the donor of the Zaccheus Clevenger Memorial Dining Hall—had awakened his wicked concupiscence. We were certainly seeing life.

I rebuked the rascal with a cold stare and turned to Agnes; but just as I was about to ask her if we had better go the lights, such as they were, went out; a spotlight fell on the dancing floor; two pots of incense on tripod mountings began to smolder at either edge of the zone of light; and the orchestra struck up something that intended to be Oriental. The show was about to begin; and, peering at the program, I learned that we were about to see the Old Babylon Ballet, with Miss Wanda Wing as the goddess Ishtar, and the Gardens Dancers as the temple slaves.

Wanda Wing! Wiggling Wanda! Of course I'd been here before—years ago, just after the war, when this place that was now the Hanging Gardens of Babylon had been the Beach of Tahiti; and Miss Wanda Wing, now wriggling across the floor in a single long garment of transparent silk, had been the Princess Lava-Lava, gay in wreaths of flowers and a grass skirt. Time had passed and fashions had changed; one head waiter after another had retired to clip coupons at his country estate; the South Seas had gone out and archeological antiquities had come in; but Wanda Wing wiggled on forever. Geography meant nothing to her; they could understand her art in Sumer and Akkad as well as in Polynesia.

Or in Indianapolis. Agnes was staring, with shining eyes.

"Isn't it revolting?" she said happily. "To think such things could be tolerated, in a Christian country. What a field there is for persons like ourselves, Dr. Deupree! I wonder——"

But just then she and I were both distracted by an argument at the next table. I gathered that the man of the world had been trying, vainly, to get a drink; but as I turned the waiter shrugged angrily and walked away, and the man of the world, shrugging too, took a little whistle out of his pocket and blew it shrilly. The music wailed into silence; Miss Wanda Wing stood still, after a few futile wiggles; and in the dimness we heard the crunch of chairs pushed back, loud voices, a woman's scream.

Then the lights flashed on, and our man of the world stood up and leaned over the balcony.

"Keep your seats, everybody. Be calm. The exits are guarded. None of you will be disturbed unless you resist an officer."

An officer! Here and there, over the house, men in evening dress had risen and were moving about with ostentatious display of badges such as our neighbor wore. Agnes's face turned as white as her page on the Recording Angel's blotter.

"What's the matter?" she whispered.

"The house is pinched."

"Oh, oh!" she sobbed. "Whatever will my friends——"

"Don't worry. They'll only arrest a waiter or two. They won't even want us as witnesses."

"But it will get into the paper."

"Nobody will know you were here. And even if they did——"

I stopped then, for it would have been sheer cruelty to remind her that we were at the Hanging Gardens only to understand conditions, and fit ourselves for greater usefulness. Besides, just at that moment the man of the world stepped around into our alcove and remarked courteously:

"I'm afraid I must ask you to let me have those drinks."

Agnes screamed, then, and by a nervous jerk of her arm accidentally knocked her glass clear over the railing. There was another scream from below. I reached out one foot and kicked over the bucket with the bottle; but the officer pounced on my glass and seized it before I had time to intercept him. I caught his wrist; his other hand went into his pocket; then we both looked at Agnes.

"I stand on my constitutional rights as a citizen," I said firmly. "You can't have that glass without a warrant."

"Will you kindly step out into the aisle, madam?" Pulling her cloak over her shoulders, Agnes stumbled out.

"Now," he said, "unless you want to come along with me——"

I dropped into a confidential whisper.

"You'll need better evidence than that. Taste it—but don't let her see you." My grip loosened as he raised the glass to his lips—

"Why," he grunted, "it's only cider and soda water."

"Sh!" I begged. "She doesn't know the difference. She's been getting a champagne thrill all evening. But I'm ruined if she finds it out."

He *was* a man of the world. He cleared his throat loudly, then turned and looked at Agnes, leaning limp against a table with quivering lips.

"You win," he said politely. "Madam, I felicitate you on an escort who knows his constitutional rights."

The glass crashed on the floor as he let it go, and, bowing, edged past her into the aisle. Agnes stumbled back into our alcove, and I caught her as she dropped heavily in her chair.

"Oh, oh," she gasped. "You were so wonderful! I thought we were ruined. But you were so masterful——"

She buried her face in her hands and began to sob.

"There, there," I whispered, patting her arm. "It's all right. There'll be no more trouble."

For two of the officers were bringing up Sylvain and a couple of lesser waiters to our neighbor, who spoke to them in an undertone and then shepherded them toward the door. The rest of the raiding party was gathering there; I saw the glint of bottles. The man of the world turned benignly toward the crowd.

"It's all over, ladies and gentlemen. Don't be alarmed."

With belated bravado, the orchestra struck up a one-step.

Yes, he was a man of feeling. I couldn't understand why he was an enforcement officer; though

when I read in the next day's papers that Sylvain and the others had been discharged for lack of evidence, and that the Hanging Gardens were still in business at the old stand, I thought I could guess.

XV.

Frail Children of Dust.

AGNES was almost a nervous wreck; her one desire was to get out and get home. For five minutes she'd seen visions of herself in jail, and her shame blazoned all over the front page of the Indianapolis papers; and the revulsion from that paralyzing terror was almost as demoralizing as the terror itself.

But to get out and get home was also the principal desire of most of the other customers. It took me a long time to get the waiter, a longer time to get change. Agnes's sobbing had stopped, but she was still trembling violently, and when we finally started for the door and were caught in the crowd moving slowly down the stairs I had to put my arm around her shoulders. Holding Agnes up was no lazy man's job, and I was acutely aware of the fact that it must look to people around us as if she had drunk too much. But luckily I saw nobody whom I knew; we got out to the street, and she managed to cross the sidewalk under her own power.

Taxis were coming up in a stream, but the curb was lined with clamoring refugees fighting for them. I took Agnes a little way down the street, and here we found an ancient and moth-eaten four-wheeler,

open to the evening air, and drawn by a venerable horse who was probably drawing a Civil War pension as well.

"Better than nothing," I said as I handed her in. "After all, it isn't very far to the Ritz."

But Agnes cheered up amazingly when we were trotting down the street, away from the Hanging Gardens.

"Suppose we drive around a little and get the air," she proposed. "It was terribly stuffy in there; and I ought to clear my head of the—the fumes of wine."

I couldn't tell her that there were no fumes of wine. I could only protest, feebly, that it was pretty late. Agnes looked at a jeweled wrist watch that must have used up the best part of a thousand dollars.

"Twenty minutes past one," she said. "Later than I've ever stayed out before. But I feel quite safe in your company. Of course, I could never have dreamed of going to such a place with any other man, but I know you'll keep our escapade a secret. You're different."

Old lines, but a new woman. Cheerlessly, I told the driver to take us up the Avenue—at this hour of the night automobiles would be few. Pedestrians were few, too; Agnes and I sat in a cab open to the view of all, but for all that our privacy was pretty nearly complete. New York is no longer a nocturnal town.

"What a terrible experience!" she sighed. "Of course, I suppose it's nothing new to you——"

"Why, Mrs. Clevenger, I'm not a night hawk."

"Now don't try to apologize for your mode of life. I'm broad-minded. I could see from the way you dealt with that officer that you're used to this sort of thing. I'm not asking if you bribed him, but I saw what I saw."

"I wish I could make you see what I see," I sighed. "There are things in this town that I'd like to show you, if we had time; the way people live——"

"I presume you live in a club, don't you?"

"No," I said, "I have an apartment. A tiny apartment across the street from the university."

"That must be a delightful life," Agnes mused, slumping wearily back against the cushions, her shoulder touching mine. "I—I don't believe I'd be up to this sort of thing. Not every night, that is. But the quiet life of a scholar, in a small apartment, free from the cares of a large establishment, from the manifold worries of luxury, yet comfortable and cozy and Bohemian . . . I should love a small apartment."

"Oh, it isn't so comfortable as it looks," I put in hastily. "My cousin, Mrs. Torrey, for instance, who lives in sixteen rooms on Park Avenue, likes my place when she comes in for tea; but she wouldn't live there."

"So you give teas in your apartment! How charming! How Bohemian! I've read of that sort of thing, but I've never had the opportunity to attend one."

There was only one possible answer to a lead like that.

"Then I'll give one next week," I promised, "and

you'll be the guest of honor. Week after next, I mean—as soon as the conference is over."

"It seems like a long time, doesn't it? Couldn't we slip away from the conference some afternoon?"

She was leaning quite frankly against my shoulder, and our dusty cab was pervaded by a faint fragrance. I was trembling, now; I couldn't help it, though I cursed myself for it.

"I think we could," I suggested. "I'll have to stay there through Monday, for my speech; but after that—how about Tuesday?"

"I think we could take Tuesday off," said Agnes. "It would be delightful. Really, you're making me feel quite at home in New York. I suppose you feel that you would have to have some one else at your tea—some other women—but——"

"Oh, yes," I assured her. "That's quite essential."

"Oh," said Agnes. "Of course you know the etiquette of such matters. Still it would be a pleasure to meet your friends."

Her tone made it clear that it was not only a pleasure but a duty—and while we'd been talking, the cabman, confident that he knew our minds, had turned across the Plaza and was approaching the entrance to the Park. I must stop that.

But how could I stop him without an implied affront to Agnes? And the worst of it was that only half of me wanted to stop him—the Deupree half. I studied Agnes's averted face; she looked to me like a woman who expected to be surprised by being kissed.

Yes, she felt safe with me, but I didn't feel safe with her. She was leaning against the shoulder that was used to being leaned against, but wasn't used to being leaned against by Agnes. There was an appalling and delightful novelty about that. All my good resolutions were melting away under the terrible attraction of a beauty that I'd created. A new woman, freshly made in Eden, and hungry for apples . . .

I didn't want to kiss her; very possibly she didn't want me to kiss her. But she and I were helpless in the hands of this attraction—frail children of dust, and feeble as frail. It was a thousand to one that before our ride was over I'd be engaged to fill the place of the late Zaccheus. To-morrow morning either of us might repent. But if Agnes repented she had an alibi. She had been plied with wine; she had been helpless before my alcoholic advances. If she looked me over in the cold light of day and decided that I wouldn't do as a second husband, she could vindicate her judgment and put me in my place by blaming it all on the Demon Rum.

But if I repented, where was my alibi? I couldn't blame it on cider and soda water.

Either way, it was a black night for Wyndham College. A black night and sultry; I passed a handkerchief over my forehead and looked again at Agnes. She seemed expectant.

"Mrs. Clevenger——" I began hoarsely.

"Yes? What were you about to say?"

Yes, what was I about to say? I didn't know; but in a moment I'd have to say it.

Then there was a rumble of thunder overhead.

"We'll get caught in the rain," I cried. "Driver! To the Ritz!"

"I didn't feel any rain," Agnes protested. "Wasn't that the noise of the elevated?"

But just then a raindrop, big as a dollar, splashed on her forehead.

"Goodness!" she cried. "My clothes!"

"I can put the top up," the driver offered, clambering down.

"Two dollars if you can't," I whispered in his ear. So he couldn't; he turned and lashed the veteran horse, and we galloped down the Avenue with clusters of raindrops, forerunners of the storm, splashing about us. I didn't care about Agnes's clothes; she could buy more clothes. But now that the weather had reprieved me I was determined that whatever might have to be settled between us would be settled on its merits; not on the basis of a wild attraction that carried me off my feet, or on the basis of Agnes's belief that she was drunk.

We reached the hotel, just in time, and when I left Agnes in the lobby she forgot that she'd been disappointed; she remembered only that her first evening gown had just escaped being rained on. But there would be other nights. I could read expectation in her eyes and her lingering hand-clasp; and I couldn't expect it to rain every night at Maplecrest.

That was all right; even delay would help. I thought it all over again next morning; the day on which our conference was to begin. Agnes was lunching with some Y. W. C. A. workers to-day—her

associates in the life of good works had at last discovered her whereabouts—and was going up to Maplecrest with them afterward. Well enough; it seemed to me that even a brief separation would be good for us. For after last night the situation had become delicate. Our sentimental journey was just beginning; some time in the next few days I'd have to kiss her, or definitely, once for all, eternally and immutably not kiss her. There were objections to either course.

What objections? Why shouldn't I marry her, if she'd have me? A college professor ought to marry money; it wouldn't hurt my standing at Columbia University to become attached to eight millions, and Agnes and I could fatten and pamper Wyndham College on the money that otherwise would have to go into income tax. And she was alluring—to a certain point. To a certain point. For the truth is that as I thought over my association with Agnes, I realized that there had been stretches that were somewhat wearing.

Life with Agnes would conceivably be depressing, to a man more sensitive than the late Zaccheus. For after all, I reflected as I sat over my coffee and cigarette, with the morning paper unread on the table before me—after all, the point of the whole thing was that fundamentally she didn't excite me. Making her dress up had been exciting; showing her the town had been exciting; wondering whether I would kiss her, in the cab last night, had been entirely too exciting for comfort. But excitement like that would fade. And Agnes herself, pure and sim-

ple—Agnes across the dinner table, Agnes in the conversational parlor, Agnes as she would look beside the living-room fire on a long winter evening—Agnes, as such, left me cold.

My eyes wandered again to that snapshot of Lucile. I'd never wondered whether or not I wanted to kiss Lucile; I'd never left her unknissed, when she wanted to be knissed as badly as Agnes had wanted it last night; I'd never been disturbed by chill premonitions about life with her.

Life. What was it? Not the front page, not murders and bankruptcies, depression and prosperity, war and peace. I turned over the paper to that other page, farther back, that held the record of the steady current that flowed on through all the changing front-page news; the epitome of the life of the average man to whom nothing of news value ever happened, whose simple annals were chronicled only in paid advertisements inserted by himself or his parents or his children.

And what was this life? What was Man? He was born; he underwent confirmation or bar mitzvah, as the case might be; he became engaged; he was married. After that, there was a long, long silence. Nothing else happened, nothing important enough to be advertised in the papers, until he died. Then he became a person of brief consequence. He was duly lamented in resolutions of the Royal Arch Masons, the Free Sons of Israel, or the Knights of Columbus; the Alumni of Public School No. 37, the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, the Uptown Talmud Torah, or the Holy Name Society.

In time his friends were invited to the unveiling of his mausoleum, and perhaps his children, for a year or two, commemorated the anniversary of his death with abominable poetry. Frail children of dust . . . In that long arid interval between marriage and death a man would need companionship, perhaps, but companionable companionship. If he couldn't get that, better have none at all. I had seen no woman, since Lucile, with whom I cared to try it.

I lunged for the telephone, called up Edith, and caught her just on the point of leaving for Southampton.

"When are you coming back?" I demanded.

"Monday. Why?"

"I want you to come up here to tea on Tuesday. I want you to meet Mrs. Clevenger. You remember—the friend of the family I told you about."

"Why, Alec, I'm going to be terribly busy. Getting ready for this trip, and so on——"

"Edith, the blood of the dead Deuprees will cry out from the ground if you don't come. I've invited her, and I need you as hostess—as chaperone—as the atmosphere of respectability."

"But I——"

"No nonsense," I interrupted. "You must come."

"Oh, very well," said Edith with unexpected meekness. I could have capered with joy. It was the first time I'd ever talked to Edith like that, and the first time I'd ever got anything out of her but good advice. I really needed her. I might fall in love with Agnes; I might marry her; but not without

due deliberation. I wasn't going to hunt trouble by having her alone at tea—right across the street from the university, in an apartment house that had lately figured in two front-page divorces. It was time for Edith to do some work for the family; and I'd made her promise it, by using the strong hand. The strong hand seemed to be effective with women. I must use it more freely with Agnes.

But this mood of self-satisfaction didn't last long. I had packed my bag and was on the point of leaving for my conference, when the telephone rang again. Frances.

"Alec, I want to see you."

"But I'm just catching a train."

"Alone?" she asked.

"But certainly, alone."

"Then meet me at the subway station and let me ride downtown with you. Please, Alec."

I never could refuse women gracefully, at least when they said "Please, Alec," in that tone. So I yielded, and found her waiting in front of the ticket window with a look of worry.

"Alec—I'm disappointed in you."

"Bad news," I admitted, "but don't tell me why you're disappointed till we're started. I have to make that train."

The subway express was crowded; we hung to swaying straps; to be heard above the roar she had to raise her voice.

"Alec, I didn't suppose that just because I—I couldn't return your feeling, you'd let yourself go."

I felt a chill that couldn't have been a mere subterranean draft.

"Who says I've let myself go?"

"Don't deny it, Alec. I'm broad-minded; I don't believe in the double standard, but I accept it as a fact."

"What on earth are you talking about?" She frowned at me like a schoolteacher.

"Alec, Jerome covered that raid on the Hanging Gardens last night. He saw you."

"What if he did?" I asked with a feeble pretense of boldness. "I was only entertaining a friend from out of town."

"He'd seen you with this woman before. And he said last night she was so drunk you had to carry her out to the taxi. You never entertained me like that. Of course, I know enough to stop when I've had all that's good for me."

She must hear the truth, for Agnes's sake. Yet I felt that the truth wouldn't get over.

"Fan, that girl was scared to death—that's all. She hadn't had anything to drink. She'd never been in a café like that before, and the raid upset her. That's all. Absolutely."

She shook a sorrowful head.

"But, my dear, I don't mind what you do; I know that men are men. Only I hate to think that I've driven you to go out on these wild parties, and I'm terribly hurt, Alec—really—because you don't trust me well enough to be frank with me. I thought we were such good friends."

The people sitting in front of us could hear her; they were looking at me already with a prurient curiosity. I was being advertised to the world as a Lothario.

"We were," I said, "but we won't be much longer if you don't believe what I tell you. I repeat that this girl wasn't drunk; that we're only friends—hardly more than acquaintances—and that I was just showing her the town. Why—didn't you tell me yourself that nobody thought of me in that way?"

"Oh, well—I meant nobody who knew you. And if you go out looking for trouble and pick up some girl that wants excitement——"

"But I tell you——"

"Of course you tell me; it's like you to try to protect the girl. Jerome said she looked like a nice girl; and I do hope, Alec, you'll think about her side of it, before you go too far."

The train stopped at 72nd Street.

"Fan," I said, "you've gone too far already. You'd better get off here, before we have a real quarrel in front of a crowd."

For I liked her, confound it, with all her leaping imagination. I felt a real compunction as the train pulled on and I caught a last glimpse of her distressed face. She meant well, and she liked me. But these hasty inferences—I must do what I could to head them off, in fairness to Agnes.

Later, it occurred to me that while Frances was perfectly willing to trust me when I was with her, she didn't trust me at all when I was with other

women. That might have cheered me up if I hadn't so much on my mind. For here I was going to the conference; I hadn't written my speech, and I might not have time to write it when I took charge of Agnes.

Agnes . . .

XVI.

Cuckoos and Chicken Hawks.

WHEN I reached Maplecrest there was no emotion left in me but envy for the rich who could make this stuffy trip on hot June days by motor instead of by train. My tastes were simple; my salary had covered my needs, at least until I started entertaining Agnes. But when I thought of the difference between riding up through the Westchester hills in a smooth-riding, soft-cushioned car, and this agony of dust and wicker seats and squalling infants—well, there was much to be said for eight million dollars.

But a bath and a shave cheered me up; the inn was luxurious, the entertainment was free. Hearing that Agnes hadn't arrived, I strolled down to the lobby to look over the early comers—the opening session was to take place after dinner—and within ten minutes I was all depressed again. Our conference was not appetizing. I knew these people—knew the type, at least; diluted old men and acid young men; women who defied classification, but among whom the renovated Agnes would stand out like the morning star in a sky full of tallow candles.

Gushmore held court at the entrance to the tea

room, bowing right and left, chatting affably with the women, greeting the men with the courteous fortitude of one who was doing his discouraged best to raise the rest of the world to his own level. If there had been no Agnes, I should have pretended to mistake him for the head waiter, and offered him five dollars; but I couldn't afford to be deported from the conference and leave Agnes to his wicked machinations. Besides, I needed my five dollars; and he'd have kept it.

I turned away from the tea room. Not yet would I meet the inevitable Gushmore; not yet would I plunge into the sort of conversation in which I must float for the week to come. So I prowled about the hotel, and presently came to a subterranean vaulted chamber where a white-coated man lounged at a long and vacant bar, as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean, and a dark stout man sat at a table reading a newspaper, behind a tall glass of something that looked like ginger ale. Then he looked up, and I knew it wasn't ginger ale.

"Jerome Hershfield!" I groaned. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"Earning an honest living," he grumbled, "covering this nut conference for the Record. But what the devil are you doing here? Oh, yes, I saw your name on the program; but I happen to know that the benevolent lady who leased the hotel hasn't given Gushmore any money to pay speakers. And if you talk for nothing——"

I sighed.

"I'm no English novelist; they can get me for

my board and lodging. It's hot in town, and I thought this would be a rest."

"Hah!" he laughed coarsely. "It won't. But sit down and have a drink, anyway. I've established relations with the house."

I sat down, trying to hide my consternation. Of course he'd see Agnes, and I'd have to explain.

"Why did they happen to pick you for this assignment?" I asked with a peevishness that he didn't notice because his own peevishness was so much greater.

"Why did they pick me? Why, Alec, I once wrote a funny story that the boss liked. I get all the humor assignments now."

"Well, that's not so bad."

"Oh, isn't it? What can I say, what can anybody say, about this conference that's as funny as the thing itself? What can anybody say about anything in this day and age that's as funny as things as they are? You might as well try to blacken the ace of spades. However, that's what they pay me for, so I have to stay. But you—you'd better pack up right now, if all you expect is a rest."

"They look pretty bad," I admitted. "But there must be a few human beings in the lot."

"Well disguised."

I turned over the leaves of the program.

"I notice that they divide us into delegates, honorary delegates, and other persons. I'm only a person. I can remain quiet under the affront if they set a good table, but I wonder why."

"Oh, you persons are the class of the conference,"

he explained. "You've come here for free advertising or a free vacation—merely this and nothing more. But you're only the scenery of this drama. Besides the delegates and the honorary delegates, there's the committee in charge; you've overlooked that. Speakers and persons are the scenery and decorations, the delegates are the chorus, and the action of the play consists in the efforts of the committee to shake down the honorary delegates. The unhappy victims are——"

"Persons of great wealth and benevolent inclinations," I suggested.

"You have it," said Hershfield. "The wealth being more essential than the inclinations. For this is an extraordinarily alert lot of people here. The main point is to get some generous person to finance a permanent organization for the promotion of assorted uplift, with big salaries and no auditing. But anybody here will accept any donation of money for any purpose. There is little false pride."

"Gushmore, I suppose, looks after the best prospects——"

"Your supposition is correct. I believe the professional ethics of the situation is this—he got up the conference, he turned up most of the suckers, and by way of commission he gets first chance at the easy ones. The others take what's left. I've known Gushmore for years. He can persuade any woman that his real name's Galahad, and that all he needs to cure the evils that afflict suffering humanity is a little more money. He's just back from Moscow with a large stock of assorted ideals slightly dam-

aged in shipment, and you might regard this conference as a sort of sacrifice sale. He knows what he wants, but if he can't put over his pet idea of the permanent organization he'll let his goods go below cost, if necessary, for the sake of a quick turnover. Now are you going to stay, or will you check out and take the next train back to town?"

"Oh, I have to stay," I said. "One of my friends is coming up as an honorary delegate."

"Ah! A lady, no doubt."

"A lady." I drew a long breath and decided to get it over with. "The lady you saw with me last night, at the Hanging Gardens. Oh, yes; I happened to see Fan before I left town; she told me. And I want to tell you, Jerome, that you're all wrong. I was just taking her around a little before the conference, and we went to the Hanging Gardens; nothing to drink, but she was scared when they pulled the place——"

Then I stopped, for I had a feeling that this wasn't convincing despite his courteous "I see." After all, he was a reporter. I could see how the thing was taking shape in his mind: "Mr. Deupree yesterday issued the following statement." And the statements of accused persons were old stuff to him.

If I could have told all I might have persuaded him. But I couldn't tell all about my relations with Agnes. Much of that history was highly personal, and a relation of it to a stranger wouldn't reflect much credit on either Agnes or me.

Besides, I had an uneasy feeling that he was thinking of something else. I used to take Fan out two

or three nights a week. Now I stayed away and my absence had become noticeable. Jerome must know that there was something behind that; if he didn't suspect me of a hopeless passion for his wife—and she might have dropped hints and intimations that would plant that suspicion—he would certainly think that I had discovered an overshadowing interest in another woman. The truth might make me free; but I couldn't disturb what Fan had called the beautiful relationship between us three by injecting a little truth into it.

"Oh, well," I said wearily, "you don't have to believe me. That's the truth, but let it go. Only I don't want Fan to go telling it around our university that I've been seen carrying drunken women out of cafés. And try to forget what you saw when you meet Mrs. Clevenger."

"Mrs. Clevenger, eh? And she's an honorary delegate. It looks bad, Alec. Does she know Gushmore?"

"Slightly."

"I've seen her," he pursued. "She's a beauty. He'll give you an awful run, unless you work hard. He'll marry her, unless you——"

"I hope to prevent that," I said modestly. But I began to realize that it would mean eternal vigilance. It wouldn't be safe to give this magnetic Gushmore five minutes alone with her. I'd have to spend every moment at her side. And if I spent every moment at her side, in this gracious atmosphere of country-club luxury—why, this matter that ought to be left to work itself out would rush to a

decision within three days. I'd either be definitely engaged to Agnes—a prospect that I couldn't regard with entire equanimity—or definitely out of the race and in no position to stop Gushmore.

"I'll stick to her as much as I can," I mused, "but a little help would be useful. If you could give her some idea of what you think of Gushmore——"

"Now look here, you needn't expect me to play John Alden to your Miles Standish. If you don't want Gushmore to marry this woman, you'll have to take care of her yourself. I have troubles of my own. I sent an advance story about the conference last night that set Gushmore hopping. Such honest uplifters as had wandered in here by mistake—for there are honest people in this business—mostly left this morning, as soon as they'd read it. No. But if you need help I've got a colleague that might be useful. A man come up to do a feature story for our Sunday magazine. He won't do more than two hours' work all week. He's not a newspaperman; he's an author. Name's Wyman—Don Wyman. Ever hear of him?"

"Don Wyman? I used to know him well when he lived on Morningside; but I hadn't heard of him for two or three years. Where is he?"

"He curled up and went to sleep after lunch," said Hershfield, "but it would be no more than a friendly act to keep him from sleeping through dinner."

Don didn't think it was a friendly act at first, but when Hershfield had rolled up the shade, and Don

had squirmed, and groaned, and turned over, and rubbed his eyes, he finally recognized me and sat up eagerly.

"Well, Alec Deupree! Where on earth have you been?"

"Where I always was. Where have you been?"

"Out West. Chicago. I came back in April, but I didn't know how to find you——"

"And of course he never thought of looking in the telephone book," Hershfield put in. "It takes a newspaperman to master the art of thorough investigation. See you fellows at dinner—I'm going down to explain to Gushmore why it won't pay him to throw me out."

"Well!" said Don, sitting up in bed in the splendor of purple silk pajamas and rumpled hair. "So you're still at Columbia. Married?"

"Not yet," I answered cautiously. "And you?"

He groaned.

"Oh, I've had the very devil of a time. There was a girl in Chicago—— I never knew anybody like her. The best job I ever had—the most wonderful girl I ever met—and I lost them both. God, Alec, I could have been somebody if I'd met her in time."

"Somebody had beaten you to her?"

He nodded.

"It all began when some Middle Western plutocrats decided to put the Atlantic seaboard in its place by getting out a flashing, scintillant review of the fashion, art, wit, and learning of the corn belt. A Middle Western cross between *Vanity Fair* and

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Town Topics. Very cosmopolitan they wanted it, so of course they had to come to New York for an editor. And I got the job."

"Have I seen this magazine?"

"No," said Don. "Nobody saw it but the news-dealers, and they refused to see it after the third issue. The trouble was that each of the angels had his own idea about how to run it. If they'd let me alone—— But they didn't, and just as I saw what was coming and prepared to get from under they beat me to it.

"Well, at any rate that left me free to work out my own ideas, if I could find anybody to pay the printer. There was one man in the lot who looked good for one more contribution—quite a patron of artists, took a pride in being the Mæcenas of Sheridan Road, and so on. I knew him tolerably well by this time—him and his wife—so we persuaded him—his wife and I—to lend me ten thousand on my personal note, unsecured. Alec, that moment was the peak of my career.

"Then I realized that I was in love with his wife."

I shook my head sympathetically.

"Hard luck, old man. For of course you couldn't take the money after that."

"It was already taken. Not only taken, but spent. Ah, but I got out a wonderful magazine, Alec—that April number. I'll show you a copy when we get back to town—meant to bring one up with me, but I forgot it. Splendid piece of work. But that issue died in its ranks. It never left the news stands. And the girl——"

"Yes, yes," I murmured.

"Oh, I can't make you understand it," he muttered stormily. "You're so cold and intellectual; you couldn't fall in love with a married woman. I oughtn't to tell you all this, of course, but I've kept it bottled up so long that it hurts. She was a golden, capricious creature, and splendidly reckless in the grip of our emotion; she'd have been willing to throw everything away and——"

"Fly with you?" I supplied.

"Precisely. Fly with me. But what could I offer her? Her husband could give her wealth and position, the luxury she needed and craved. I could give her nothing but myself. A poor gift, that. A poor gift."

He dropped into a graceful Byronic pose and held it long enough for me to realize what an extraordinarily munificent gift he thought he was. All the same, he was really moved, more deeply than I had ever seen him.

"So, for her sake, I went away. We passed out of each other's lives forever. If I dared to tell you of our last meeting, how she begged me to take her with me—— I've wished a thousand times, since then, that I'd done it . . . Perhaps it would have been better to do the heroic thing and take the consequences; but she'd led a sheltered life; they'd never trained her to be heroic. I could have stood anything except to soil her fineness by letting her do something—smudgy; something that would get into the papers. Was I right?"

"I don't know," I told him. "Nothing like that

ever happened to me. I am reliably informed that I'm not the sort to inspire a grand emotion. But if any woman did feel like that about me, I'd kick over the traces and tell everybody to go to the devil before I'd lose her."

I knew, of course, that I'd probably do nothing of the sort; but the Gaylord tradition suggested that this was the proper thing to say. Don, however, disagreed.

"You'd think of her first," he said gently. "You wouldn't soil her. But—God, Alec, it hurts. . . . Well—let's forget my troubles. What are you doing here?"

I was ashamed to come back to my own petty chronicles after this splendid tragedy of love and parting.

"Ostensibly," I apologized, "I'm here to make a speech. But I'm also trying to protect a friend of mine—a woman of considerable means who's likely to fall into the wrong hands in this crowd. She's very generous, and she's very beautiful, and—well, the long and short of it is that I'm here to keep some fortune hunter from running off with her."

"Beautiful and generous," he murmured. "Yes, *she* was like that. I envy you, Alec."

"She's a charming woman," I said. "No doubt you'll meet her. I suppose you don't care much for the company of women now——"

"Dust and ashes in my mouth," he assured me.

"It's too bad," I mused. "I'd hoped—before I heard this story of yours—that you could help me entertain her. She's rather inexperienced, but

she's only thirty-two, and a raving beauty, and worth about eight million dollars; and I'm afraid some of these highbinders will try to marry her unless I keep her amused. And I may need help——"

"After all," he said more cheerfully, "one must go on living. Life seems pretty pointless and empty to me just now, but I ought to try to dull the pain. I'm a good talker, Alec; even though I feel like nothing but a hollow shell, I manage to be entertaining. It's one's duty to society to bury one's personal sorrows. Perhaps I could help you out."

"Then you might as well get your clothes on and come downstairs with me," I suggested, "and see if she's here."

But the desk had heard nothing from Mrs. Clevenger. I got into a telephone booth in some anxiety and called the Ritz.

"Hello!" came a feeble voice some fifteen minutes later. "Yes, this is Mrs. Clevenger . . . What? . . . Oh, Dr. Deupree! . . . Oh, you're there already!"

"Why aren't you here?" I asked. "Waiting for your friends?"

"No, they went up this afternoon. And I had such an awful headache that I stayed here. It must have been the smoke and the—the atmosphere in the café last night; and—well, you understand."

I understood well enough. Agnes had autosuggested herself into a hangover. The thought gave me some compunction, and the thirty miles of wire between us gave me recklessness; I forgot that we needed a little time to cool off.

"If you're ill," I told her, "I'd better come back to town and see if I can do anything for you. I can't let you stay in New York all alone."

"Oh, please don't put yourself out. I'm feeling a great deal better now. I—I believe such a sensation passes, doesn't it? I'm sure I can come up to-morrow."

"I miss you very much," I said, and meant it. Even if her illness was imaginary, I couldn't think of anything just now but Agnes's too sudden plunge into the world of low desires and fleeting toys. It was my fault, or at any rate I thought so at the moment.

"If you're not here by noon to-morrow," I asserted, "I'm going to come down and see you. No, you needn't try to stop me. You'll be lonesome."

Agnes, too, became reckless over the wire.

"I've been lonesome to-day," she confessed. And evidently she had been, for despite frequent mention of racking pain she talked six dollars and ninety cents' worth.

XVII.

Rest Cure on Broadway.

OUR conference opened with a hurrah that night, in the noblest strain of enlightened liberalism. The keynote was sounded by a Senator who was used to talking to empty seats while his colleagues told stories in the cloakroom, and who capered with joy when he found that this audience didn't walk out on him. To reward it, he spread himself for four hours and a half, passing from the commonplaces of the need for revising the Poison Treaties and holding out a friendly hand to the Great Experimenters in Russia to a fine pre-millennial sermon on the coming reaction against reaction. When he had finished our delegates went about with the vindictive exhilaration of those who would soon be lying in Abraham's bosom, and laughing at the Wicked Old Men and the International Bankers and the rest of the reactionaries as they called vainly for water amid the infernal flames. I gathered by conversation with some of them that there was every reason to expect that the various difficulties which had so far obstructed human progress would all be removed by the end of next week.

This was all well enough for those who liked it, but I didn't belong. Saturday morning came, and more

talk—talk that went on simultaneously in three or four sessions, while all the time I had the feeling that Gushmore and his friends, behind the scenes, were besetting persons of great wealth and benevolent inclinations. But not Agnes. Agnes hadn't come; and as the hours passed, and I wandered about in gloomy solitude—for Hershfield and the other newspapermen were working, and Wyman was asleep—I began to build great hopes on the continuance of her headache. When she failed to appear on the noon train I decided to go back to town on the 12:51. I didn't have to be at this conference until Monday night; perhaps I could persuade her to spend the week-end in town.

There was ordinarily no better place on earth to spend a week-end than Maplecrest Inn; but there were a number of better places, while Maplecrest was entertaining this conference. And there are few better places than Manhattan in June, when even the streets seem to come into blossom. I could amuse Agnes, in town. Of course, there was that ever-present problem of what I was going to say to her, and what she was going to say to me; but we had both had time to relax, to get over our inclination to take the grades in high. If Agnes felt as I did, and there was some reason to think this probable, she'd feel that we'd better pause and get a little better acquainted before we resumed where we had left off.

As a matter of precaution, in case I should miss her, I woke Wyman and put him under the most solemn oath to take care of Agnes if she arrived be-

fore I returned; and I left a note for her at the desk explaining that my friend Mr. Wyman wanted to meet her, and laying more emphasis on the fact that Mr. Wyman's late father had been dean of a cathedral than was apt to be put on it by those who knew Mr. Wyman. Altogether, I felt that I was quite a strategist.

And after all I did miss her. At the Ritz they told me that she'd left shortly after one o'clock. The next train to Maplecrest was at 5:11, so I concluded that she'd probably gone out to lunch. I could meet her on the train. Meanwhile, I had an unusually good June afternoon to spend somewhere. No time for a ball game, hardly time for a matinee. I was lonesome; I really missed Agnes. Over a solitary lunch I perused an evening paper in the hope of finding the advertisement of some movie that might help me kill time. Nothing attractive; I was about to toss the paper away when my eye was caught by a streaming front-page headline, so big that I'd automatically ignored it as dealing with something too important to concern me. It read:

COAST HEIRESS BEANS BURGLAR,
SAVES JEWELS

Hazel was at it again.

She had gone, it seemed, to call at the Greenwich Village studio of a woman she'd known in California. Not knowing the ways of our town, she hadn't called up beforehand; the woman was out, and Hazel arrived to find the door jimmied and a burglar stuff-

ing his pockets with jewels whose value was perhaps optimistically estimated at \$50,000. She had attacked him, struggled with him, and eventually knocked him right out of the window; he was in Bellevue with many broken bones, and Hazel had received the personal congratulations of the police inspector. Also, it was pointed out, this was the same Miss Deming who had lately knocked out a masher in Times Square; who had narrowly escaped death in the collapse of a subway cut, while in the company of an unidentified person believed to be a well-known Park Avenue clubman; the same Miss Deming who was worth twelve or twenty million dollars. There was no doubt about Hazel's news value.

There was also no doubt, now, about how I wanted to spend the afternoon. I called Miss Deming at the Plaza and learned that she was at home and would be glad to see me; how glad, I didn't realize till I went up to her huge tapestried living-room—it had been a ballroom before she hired her suite—and found her playing solitaire.

"What's the matter with your conference?" she demanded. "Did it break up in a fight? Sarah and I had made up our minds to come up on Monday and hear you talk."

"Oh, don't do that," I advised her. "You'd find it very dull. That's why I'm here—after one session I needed a rest. But what's the matter with you? Why are you indoors on an afternoon like this?"

"Well," said Hazel, "if you've seen the papers—— I don't seem to be able to go out of doors

without getting into print. And while I don't take it to heart like Mrs. Torrey, I thought that—well, I needed a rest, too."

"And here we are," I added, "all ready to rest each other . . . That seems to be about all I can do for you."

"Don't believe all you see about me in the papers. I didn't knock that burglar out of the window. He ran when he saw me coming, and fell off the fire escape. What kind of a town is this, where your burglars let girls scare them out?"

"It's a good town nevertheless," I assured her. "More entertaining than my conference."

She looked at me inscrutably.

"You can't scare me out about your conference. Mrs. Torrey told me so much about your wisdom and respectability that I want to hear you make a speech, and find out if it's so. We coeds are used to sizing up professors. Besides, that excursion's the first thing Sarah and I have agreed on for quite a while, so we've got to put it through. How are you getting on with the old lady?"

I looked at her with professorial severity.

"What did you mean," I demanded, "by telling me to take her to 'Groves of Ashtaroath'? She's not only a friend of mine, but a friend of my college. You might have ruined us both. You might have lost my college a women's dormitory, and a memorial gateway, and half a million on the endowment fund."

"What's the matter? Didn't she like the show?"

"Oh, yes, she liked it—because all the good lines

went over her head. If she'd been a little quicker on the pickup——”

“What was the matter with those lines?”

“You young imp!” I exploded. “You know well enough what was the matter.”

“I saw nothing objectionable,” said Hazel serenely. “To the pure all things are pure. And it had a nice juicy problem.”

“Young woman, it isn't your fault that you belong to an illiterate generation. You never heard of Thaïs and Athanael, or Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale—probably you never even heard of David and Bathsheba. That problem is older than the multiplication table.”

“Oh, I've heard of all those people,” she assured me. “But that wasn't the problem. The problem was what became of the girl, after the preacher had had his mind broadened. Sarah and I talked it over, and she got so mad she went out and joined the Woman's Party.”

“And you?”

“Oh, I'm not old enough to vote. Besides, we take things more calmly in my generation. I don't suppose you can appreciate that.”

“Why, confound you, how old do you think I am?”

She looked at me with that wicked introspective smile.

“Not so old as Sarah,” she conceded finally. I decided to change the subject.

“How is Sarah?” I asked politely. “I hope she's sick. That is, I mean, that she isn't sick.”

“No, she isn't sick. I didn't tell her you were

coming, and she lives six rooms away; but she'll be in before long. She looks in every now and then to see that I don't cheat to run the cards out."

"Then let's go out and take a walk," I suggested, "before she comes to life. I'd ask you to come down to Long Beach and swim, but I have to catch a train back to my conference at a little after five."

"Now isn't that rotten luck? Do you know I haven't been swimming this year, and I'm simply wild about it. But I thought I'd wait till I got a real car, so I could pack up and run off for week-ends when I felt like it."

"Then you'd better let me take you over to look at the mid-year Sagamore," I proposed, "and we could go to tea afterward, and dance."

"I'm so glad you're not old and white-haired! Wait till I tell Sarah, and get my hat."

I didn't like this thing of laying everything before Sarah—Sarah, who didn't like me. And presently Hazel came back with a face so quaintly doleful that I knew something had gone wrong.

"Sarah's going with us," she announced. "She wants to get out in the open air, and she wants to see what kind of car I'm going to buy. That's what she says. And all the time I can hear her registering a vow—that's what you do to vows, isn't it?—that that child must never be allowed to stir out of her sight, particularly with a man who looks bold and bad."

"Now, you can't flatter me," I expostulated. "No man recommended by Edith Torrey could possibly be dangerous."

“But, you see, Sarah thinks as little of Mrs. Torrey as Mrs. Torrey thinks of Sarah. Each of them feels that the other will ruin my future; so they pull and push, back and forth, and I and my present get all stepped on. It is a hard life for us defenseless girls.”

We walked across to Broadway with the dragon woman interposed between me and Hazel and doing most of the talking, and came to a large, resplendent structure, formidably hygienic, in white tile and broad expanses of plate glass—rather like a butcher’s ice box, eight stories high. I led them into the ground floor lobby, walled in white marble, with a marble staircase, carpeted in blue, leading to the mezzanine. Tubbed palms and evergreens forested the floor; we trod on thick Oriental rugs; over the back of a white marble nymph, a jet of water fell into a white marble bowl.

There were antique tables, and carved chairs in dim brocade—all this with nothing but a huge window between it and Broadway—and a few young men lounged idly about, a few trim young women sat expectantly in the chairs. I whispered to one of them, and she tripped away up the staircase.

The dragon Sarah looked about her, sniffed a faint perfume of sandalwood, and flung a protecting arm about Hazel.

“Young man, I want to know what kind of a place this is you’ve brought us to.”

“Why, this is the Sagamore Building.”

“What are these people doing here?”

“Waiting for customers. Waiting to sell cars.”

"I don't see any cars," she said grimly.

"Of course not. You don't see a roll of dollar bills in the window of J. P. Morgan and Company. But I've sent for Mr. Bonner, the manager. He'll show us the cars."

"Well, this may be all right," she grumbled. "But if it ain't, I want you to know that I'll protect the child. No, don't you look around you in that sly way. If there's trouble, don't you think I'll scream. You'll scream."

But just then Bonner came stumbling down the stairs to greet me. That was one welcome I never got, for he walked right past me when he saw Hazel, and took my hurried introduction over his shoulder. Bonner had an eye for women; and yet, when he learned that Hazel was a prospective customer, the ruling passion caught him. That was what finally convinced Sarah that we weren't in a den of sin. No plotter against defenseless purity would forget his evil designs so promptly, and so obviously, when he saw a chance to make a sale.

He led us up to the mezzanine and placed us on a squishy divan; two acolytes went forward to a little stage and drew back a tall curtain of blue velvet; and there on a platform of speckless marble stood the Sagamore Midyear Model, resplendent in chaste magnificence. Hazel heaved a big sigh of joy and promptly forgot that I existed. For half an hour she and Bonner held a debate on such matters as tire mileage and gasoline consumption and revolutions per minute, drive and ignition and wheelbase, and similar occult topics; while I writhed

and wriggled in a hopeless effort to sit up on the divan, and tried unsuccessfully to persuade Mrs. Whitlow that New York was a better place to live in than the Mohave Desert.

And after all this argument, it appeared that Hazel had been inspired by mere aimless curiosity.

"It's a beauty," she admitted. "It would be a nice car for the King of Siam, or somebody like that. But I don't want a limousine. Where's your speedster?"

So we mounted another flight of marble steps, and Hazel looked at a car that began like the other in front, just as shiny and full-chested and insolent, but tapered off behind, and had no top, and contained only a single seat—just big enough, Mrs. Whitlow remarked, for herself and Hazel. It had the build and the air and the hard distinction of a bulldog; Bonner asserted that it was just as powerful as the larger car, and admitted that it would cost just as much. Hazel decided she would take it.

"But I want to get out in the country somewhere and be sure it can do seventy-five," she told him. "If one of your men——"

"All the boys are busy," said Bonner briskly. "But if you'll let me show you—say to-morrow afternoon?"

I grunted.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Do you want to kill the girl? There isn't a road within two hours' run of New York that's free enough of traffic for you to do even a mile at that rate, on Sunday afternoon."

"Well, I don't mind goin' out more than two hours' run, if Miss Deming's in a hurry to see what we can do."

Miss Deming conceded, somewhat to my disgust, that she was in precisely that much of a hurry.

"You don't stir a step without me," Sarah announced. But Bonner evaded that difficulty by pointing out the place in the back of the car where you could lift a lid and find a seat big enough for one.

"All right, young man. But if you expect to make this automobile go seventy-five miles an hour, you'll be the only one in it. Hazel can set on the fence and time you, if she likes, but I don't propose to let her risk her life——"

"Oh, yes, you do," said Hazel calmly. And to my astonishment, the dragon subsided with a few grumbles. Then it was my turn to protest.

"But you're not going to drive a—a battle cruiser like that yourself, are you?"

"Why not?"

Well, there was no reason why not, except that Edith had prepared me to find Hazel still at the pony-cart age. Even now that I knew her better, I didn't like to hear her talk of flinging this monstrous bulk of metal around our crowded suburban roads, at seventy-five miles an hour. These terrible children—this Generation! Perhaps Edith was right. They didn't realize the perils of playing with lightning speed and crushing force. In gay ignorance they rocked the boat, they monkeyed with the buzz saw.

"Yes," said Hazel, faintly smiling, "you think I ought to buy that transatlantic liner we looked at first, and have a chauffeur in uniform to run it for me. And of course you're right. I ought to be all cluttered up with a chauffeur and a butler and six or eight maids, and miss all the fun. I don't see what's the use of having money, if you have to complicate your life with houses and servants and things that only get in your way. Don't you think so?"

"I don't think about such things, on my salary. But if I had money, I suppose I'd invent more refinements in the art of taking things easy, than the world has seen since the fall of Rome."

She smiled indulgently.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. You don't even think so. You just like to hear yourself talk."

Which to a gentleman who was going to be a full-grown professor next year, from a girl who had been a freshman last year, was a really amazing piece of impertinence.

However, we got away presently from the seven-passenger palm garden. I proposed, Hazel agreed, and Mrs. Whitlow assented, that we might have tea.

"Only not just tea," said Hazel. "I want to dance. Lead me to a good orchestra; I don't care what we eat."

I had to ask Bonner, of course, but he had the grace to refuse. As the women passed out, he led me aside and looked at me in sardonic admiration.

"Well, Doc?"

"Well what?"

"Where do you get 'em?"

“Do you like this one better than the other?”

“Like her? Oh, be kind, Doc; be kind. The Fausting is good this season, eh?”

Ignoring this irreverent remark, I took Hazel and her duenna a few blocks down the street to a place which was frankly a dance hall. You could get tea there, and lemonade, and sandwiches; but they'd wasted no money on the food or the decorations; it had all gone into a magic floor and an orchestra of wizards. On a floor like this, with music like this, I could almost understand why people went in for Marathon dancing; and the fact that most of the other dancers looked like the sort of persons who might do just that didn't worry us. We had our own party.

It would have been more of a party without Sarah, of course. Not even she could find anything suspicious about this blameless place, which was virtually a gymnasium where people exercised their feet instead of their arms; but she sat erect and grimly condemnatory, like a ghost from the simpler age of the pioneers, come back to reproach the degenerate children of our time. The only escape from her was on the dancing floor, and Hazel danced like a bubble blown on the wind. Sarah's eyes followed us about like a searchlight picking out a periscope, but we didn't mind that; for I danced well, too, with a good partner, and with Hazel I was on the heights.

In the course of the sixth or seventh waltz she spoke for the first time, to inform me that this was the life.

"I hadn't danced for two months," she added. "Thank you for waking me up. Too bad you aren't staying in town over the week-end."

I came back from the windblown spaces between the stars to petty worldly troubles.

"I'd like to, but I'll have to go back on the 5:11."

Hazel turned over the arm that rested on my shoulder to look at her wrist watch.

"But you can't go back at 5:11. It's five fifteen now."

"There's another train at eight something," I recalled, but I suppose my tone was rather glum. For she burst out laughing.

"You poor thing, do you hate it as badly as all that? Why don't you stay in town till Monday, and let me drive you up in my little old car?"

Oh, the temptation of that woman! Of course I hated that conference. If I stayed in town I'd miss the miserable railroad trip—worse than ever on Saturday evening; I could amuse myself on Sunday, even if not with Hazel; and Monday morning I could see her again, and drive up beside her . . .

Yet there was Agnes. But hadn't I come to the conclusion that what Agnes and I needed just now was a well-timed separation? I'd be back at Maplecrest by Monday noon; for thirty-six hours Wyman could certainly keep Agnes free from involvements, free to miss me as much as she liked.

The Deupree conscience whispered that there was a certain amount of casuistry in this reasoning; but I threw the Deupree conscience down the cellar stairs and locked the door.

"I might skip Sunday," I conceded.

"Of course you might skip Sunday. Then we could drive around in the country for a couple of hours, in the cool of Monday morning, and turn up at the conference when the sun gets too hot. Sarah could sit on the back seat and you could talk to me."

"Then I'll call for you at the Plaza on Monday morning," I suggested. "Say about eleven."

"Oh, but then we'd miss all the freshness of the morning. I'll tell you what we'll do. You live near the university, don't you? That's right on the way. I'll drive past and pick you up; that will give you a little more time for sleep. Give me your address, and I'll honk the horn for you at eight."

Eight! What could one do with this Younger Generation, these iron children who apparently stayed up all night? I thought I was long past the time when I'd get up at eight o'clock for any woman, but there was a ruthless determination about this girl.

"Well enough," I capitulated. "And to-morrow I'll write my speech for the conference, and try to get a start on the book I mean to write this summer."

"Aren't you moral?" she sighed. "Here I'd been thinking we could run down to one of the beaches for a swim, and some more dancing; let Mr. Bonner wait a day or two. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for keeping me from breaking my plighted word. For of course I wouldn't think of such a thing now, if you feel that you have to buy off your conscience every time you have some fun."

"You're a devil," I told her, "and there's no

doubt you're in your own home town. I've been wondering all afternoon how we ever managed to keep New York going till you got here."

"That's the Kentucky blood," she observed wickedly. "Oh, yes, Mrs. Torrey told me about that, too, in a careless moment . . . Oh, goodie, they're going to give us another encore . . . By the way, I almost forgot to tell you that I'm coming to your tea on Tuesday."

"You are?" I cried in panic.

"Well! Not if you feel that way about it."

"But, my dear girl, of course I don't feel that way about it. Only——"

"Only you wonder who invited me. I don't blame you. Mrs. Torrey invited me—and Sarah. She called up from Southampton just before you came, and said that she'd promised you to come to a party—that you needed another woman to fill out, or something like that—and she was going to be too busy—so would Sarah and I take her place. And I said we would."

Hazel alone would be inconvenient, at that party; but Hazel and Sarah——

Yet I couldn't tell her they mustn't come. In view of the circumstances, Hazel might accept that; but I didn't dare entertain Agnes alone, and I could think of no other women who could fill in. I wished that a millstone were tied about Edith's neck, and that she were rolled off Southampton Beach and all the way out into the Gulf Stream.

"Oh, I'd be charmed to have *you*," I told her. "But—have you told Sarah yet? There will be

other women there. Can't you leave her at home?"

"Not without a fuss," she sighed. "But I haven't said anything to her yet, and don't you say anything to her. Maybe we can get rid of her somehow."

This was good news, for it seemed to me that for one who was after all only a hired employee, Sarah was taking a good deal on herself. And she took more on herself when we came back to the table for another cup of tea. She drew me out of Hazel's hearing for an instant and whispered grimly:

"I got my eye on you, young man. I hope I ain't averse to young folks havin' their innocent pleasure, but no foolishness! You hear me? You was holdin' the child entirely too tight in that there last dance. If I see anything more like that, I'm goin' to walk right out on the floor of this den of vice and take her away from you. You hear me? I'm on to you."

What could I say? It wouldn't do to tell her that Hazel had been doing all the snuggling.

XVIII.

Weather Report from Yesteryear.

WE managed to get through the afternoon without further arousing Sarah, and after dining with them at the Plaza I went home with my nerves untangled and my disposition considerably mollified, reflecting on the one curious resemblance between Agnes and Hazel. They were both natural persons; but with Hazel I could be natural, too.

Meanwhile, what of Agnes? I called up Wyman at Maplecrest and learned that she had arrived on the 5:11.

“Did she ask for me?” I inquired apprehensively.

“Oh, yes, she asked for you; and I told her you’d gone into town to look after her. I dated up your departure about four hours, so that the story would hang together; she’s quite grateful for your thoughtfulness.”

“But Gushmore? Has she seen him?”

“Trust me, my boy. She’s said how-do-you-do, and no more. She had dinner with me and a blameless lady professor from Bryn Mawr, who wouldn’t know what to do with money if somebody gave it to her.”

I drew a long breath of relief.

“And it hasn’t been too much of a burden for you?”

“This marvelous Norse goddess a burden?” he snorted. “Why, looking at her is like listening to Beethoven. You’ve gladdened me beyond measure.”

The moment seemed favorable.

“Then do you mind looking after her till Monday morning? I’m tied up in town. Tell her—tell her that I met the head of my department in the university, and that he wanted to spend to-morrow helping me plan my book. Yes. Tell her that.”

“All right,” he laughed. “I’ll tell her that. And it’s a good thing that I’m going to tell her, and not you.”

“It happens to be true,” I insisted, “or at least part of it. I am going to work on my book.”

“Doubtless it is true,” he conceded, “but it doesn’t sound true. However, it will sound true when I tell it.”

“And you’ll take good care of her?” I persisted.

“Leave her to me, Alec. Leave her to me.”

If his heart hadn’t been broken so recently I’d have been afraid to leave her to him, for Don, as a man of the world, completely outclassed me; he was handsome and could be agreeable, he was evidently tremendously taken with Agnes, and he needed money. But he was a man of honor; if he wouldn’t elope with his patron’s wife, he could be counted on to respect the friend of a friend—at least, over Sunday.

So I turned back to my table, stacked high with books and professional magazines, and tried to put

all women out of mind and turn back to the cold serenity of productive scholarship. My book—Yes, but first my speech for Monday night. “Colleges and the Mentally Unfit.” I supposed that meant they wanted something about intelligence tests, a field of learning in which, so far as I could gather, what was true was uninteresting and what was interesting was untrue. For the sake of my own reputation, if not of this unborable conference, I’d have to try to think of something livelier than that.

I was still thinking, pencil in hand and eye-shade pulled down over my glasses—thinking of Agnes’s blonde majesty, of Hazel’s incredible lightness on the dancing floor—when the hallboy came to the door with a special delivery letter. I looked at it with feeble curiosity, and then my heart gave a tremendous thump as I recognized the queer cubist handwriting that I hadn’t seen for seven years—not since that terrible letter in which Lucile told me that we had made an awful mistake which she had luckily discovered in time, and that she was getting ready to marry a better man.

Settled in an armchair, I tore open the envelope with shaking fingers.

ALEC DEAR:

Chicago, Friday.

I hardly know how to begin this, for I haven’t seen you in three years—or is it four?—and you may have changed and become terribly different. But I don’t believe you have; it isn’t like you. And if you’re still the Alec of the old days at Wyndham you’ll meet my train at the Grand Central at nine-forty-five Sunday morning.

Alec, I am leaving my husband. What this means—all the terrible storms of emotion that it means—I can't tell you till I see you; I can't write it. Indeed, I can hardly realize it myself as yet. But I see at last what a terrible mistake I made when I married Frank. I suppose he means well, but he's—well, he's just Frank, that's all. He can't feel the things I feel, or even understand that I feel them. For seven years I have endured a life that outraged my finer sensibilities every day; now I can endure no more.

There is a letter, Alec, that I treasure as one of the few really golden possessions of my life. It's the one you wrote to me when I told you I was going to marry Frank. Do you remember that letter, Alec? I cried a good deal over it. You said that if ever I needed a friend I had only to call on you and you'd come to me from the ends of the earth.

You meant that then; I wonder if you'd mean it now. But *you* would, you dear boy; you'd keep faith to the end. And I've learned by this time, Alec, how pitifully few are the men who will do that.

Don't be frightened; I'm not asking you to come to me; I'm coming to you, to you and New York, to build my life over again on new foundations. And I'm not going to ask anything of you in the name of those wonderful days at Wyndham. I do need you desperately, but not in an emotional way. Emotion has made a wreck of my life. I want you to stand by and help me when I start again in the big, cold world. I'll need somebody to cheer me up when I get blue and begin to lose my nerve; and you're the best friend any woman ever had. There isn't another man in the world I could ask to do this; but I know you and I need you. Will you help me, Alec? But, you dear, I know you will. I'll tell you all about it on Sunday.

With love,

LUCILE.

More work for the shoulder.

That was my first instinctive comment, when I

had read it through; and that was the net residue of an hour of feverish reflection and recollection and anticipation, and cursing myself for coldness, and damning myself for a faint-hearted feeble soul who had sworn to be faithful forever, and didn't seem to be any too faithful after seven years. Nothing that imagination tried to force on reason could controvert the fact that while I was eager to see her, flattered that in her trouble she should have turned first to me, I couldn't feel those hurricane thrills that used to shake me when I did no more than carry her books to lectures, back at Wyndham. There was no help for it—in the past seven years, seven years had passed.

It had seemed too much ever to hope, though of course I'd hoped for it; come to think of it, I'd hoped for it only last week, at Asbury Park, just before I met Agnes. But that particular hope had been a sentimental gesture; it had been years since I'd really tried to cheer myself with the conviction that she would presently realize her horrible mistake, and tell him about it; and that he would thereupon shoot himself or jump into Lake Michigan; and that we two would be happy ever after. Time had passed; it had kept on passing, day after day, for seven years. Seven years of that long, long interval between marriage and death in which, I'd been thinking so recently, nothing seemed to happen. Nothing, at least, worth putting into the paper; for certainly it was unseemly to publish the news that the emotion which was to outlast the sun and stars became, after seven years, a scrap in the

ragbag of memory, to be taken out and pawed over only as an anodyne against irritation at other women.

. . . But she needed help, and she would get it. She asked nothing, and I could give her nothing, in the name of that lost emotion. But I must give her all she might need out of mere shame that it was lost.

So, at any rate, I reasoned it out; and it gave me at least some pale consolation to reflect that this doctrine of juvenile damnation, of the inexorable punishment of unconscious guilt, was worthy of grandfather Athanasius Deupree.

Something like the old lost thrill came back of its own accord the next morning when I reached the station, breathless and worried and five minutes late, to find that her train had been delayed by a wreck. It was only a freight wreck, far ahead of Lucile; but before I discovered that I had a moment or two of quite real apprehension whose effect didn't wholly wear off in the next two hours. When at last her train was bulletined to arrive at 12:20 I was really excited. I pressed forward in the crowd held back by ropes from the doorway that led to the train platforms, peering eagerly for the first glimpse of that familiar figure.

Familiar? Well, of course I didn't expect to see the antique clothes of college days; yet the essential picture of Lucile, shrined in memory, was not the brisk young matron I'd seen occasionally when she and her husband came to New York, but the gay mirthful girl I'd known in college, slim and bobbed-

haired, whose clothes were sketchily stylish because she was poor, and had to make them herself.

Of course I didn't recognize the rather stately young woman who presently emerged from the doorway, trailed by two or three porters carrying bags and leading dogs; a young woman draped in an up-to-the-minute dress, her figure slender still, but evidently arranged—and bright red shoes. I didn't recognize her till she was within arm's length, and had recognized me, smiling all over and tumbling forward with outstretched arms.

"Oh, there you are! I knew I could count on you."

Then her arms were around my neck, and I kissed her, or she kissed me; whoever started it, there was quite a lot of it before she unwrapped me and turned to the porter . . . Seven years; I had kissed her as I might have kissed Edith, on seeing her off to China; she had kissed me as she might have kissed a life guard who pulled her out of a dangerous surf.

"Untangle their chains," she was commanding sharply. "No, this way. There!"

Proudly, she presented to me two miserable Pekinese dogs. Well, she'd always liked dogs; but the dogs she liked in college were creatures who still showed some sign of descent from the wolf—no kinship with the caterpillar.

"Aren't they loves, Alec? Mah and Jongg, I call them. Now where's the man with my bags? Oh, yes; there you are. Well! Oh, Alec, I've got so much to tell you, and I'm so glad to see you—Where are we going?"

"You usually stay at the Ritz, don't you?"

"When I come here with Frank. But, you see, when I ran away from him I—I didn't dare tell him outright; he has such a murderous temper. I slipped away while he was at the office, and left him a note. And I didn't tell him I was coming to New York; let him find out later, when I'm settled. So I don't want to go to the Ritz; it's one of the first places he'd look; he knows I can run a bill there."

"Then you'd better check your baggage and dog-gage," I suggested, "and we'll have lunch and talk it over."

"Mah and Jongg will have to have some lunch, too. You poor little sweet things, you're almost starved to death, aren't you? Leave them with the porter, Alec, and tell him to get them a club sandwich apiece. All right; that's settled. My! It's so good to be with you——"

The porter took the abominable creatures away, and Lucile caught my arm and skipped gleefully beside me as we went through the underground passage into the Biltmore. She was chattering about everything and nothing, with an excited delight that was contagious; but it wasn't till the lunch was ordered, and she was leaning forward with her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands, and a contented little smile on her lips, that she was able to tell me about it.

"Well, you see, it isn't so easy to make you understand. Frank and I haven't really quarreled, and he isn't unfaithful—at least I don't think he is, though of course you never know. No, our malad-

justment was much more subtle than that. It took me a long time to realize it; for of course I was a headstrong, foolish little thing when I married him, wasn't I, Alec? . . . Now, you dear, you know I was, but you're too chivalrous——

“Oh, it was wonderful at first to revel in his admiration and the luxury he could give me; but I matured, Alec. One becomes a woman very quickly, in the sort of life we led—a full-grown woman, with a woman's cares. I was a personality, just as much as Frank; but he never could see it. I must be myself, express myself; and he insisted that I must be nothing but his wife . . . I don't know why I flatter myself that I was that, even, in the true sense. What share did I have in his daily interests? I wasn't his wife; I was only his chattel, his plaything, just like anything else he bought with his money. Oh, yes, it was always *his* money.

“We kept clashing over trifles for a long time before I realized that the root of the trouble was simply that we were mismated—a man of the Dark Ages with a woman of to-day. And then I said to myself, what if I have given him seven of the best years of my life? Why should I give him any more? Women aren't slaves, now; they aren't poor helpless things unable to do for themselves. No, we can make our own lives if we only have the courage to regard the past as a dead loss and start again. I believe tremendously in the power of thought, don't you? I will be myself; I will express my individuality.”

Though feeling it was almost sacrilegious, I had to ask her how she was going to do it.

“Oh, there are any number of things I could do. I’m a rather unusually good dancer—remember, Alec, those gorgeous waltzes in the old gym?—and once I thought that would give me the outlet my personality craved. I’d thought of going out with a boy I knew as a sort of society team, you know—just to give interpretations at private parties, and that sort of thing. But Frank was perfectly furious when I suggested it . . . Well! I have—quite a remarkable personality, I’ve found; I have a really amazing sympathy with artists, an ability to enter into their creative feelings; and I had so many artistic friends that I was on the way to establish a salon that would have been a sort of clearing house for all the really creative spirits in Chicago. But Frank spoiled that too, with his rudeness and crass materialism.

“Then—I couldn’t tell this to anybody but you, Alec—

“A man came into my life who was everything that Frank wasn’t—cultured and sensitive, and the soul of honor. He was a perfect Bayard, Alec! I was mad about him—— Oh, I know you’ll think it was wicked of me—you’ve always had such high ideals; but I’d have given up everything for him—flung my good name in the gutter for the world to trample on. But it would have ruined him as well as me; and I couldn’t, for his sake. He’s dreadfully brilliant, just on the threshold of a wonderful

career; a scandal that got into the papers would have ruined him.

"Oh, I'm human, Alec, a poor little weak thing; I can't tell you all the long sleepless nights of torment I lived through before I steeled myself to send him away, out of my life, forever. Even now I cry every night because I did it—— Do you think I'm a bad woman, Alec?"

"I think you're an angel," I said recklessly. She smiled, and laid her hand on mine.

"You're a dear . . . Of course, I couldn't go on living with Frank after that. It would have been sacrilegious, wouldn't it? And then we had a quarrel—over money—and he grabbed my shoulders and shook me. He'd never been brutal to me before. So I made up my mind then and there to leave him, to come to New York, to live my own life. And I thought of you, and how dear and dependable you are, and I knew you'd do anything——"

"Of course I will," I told her. "And the man? Where did he go?"

She looked at me with wet, starry eyes.

"I don't know. Somewhere out into this big, cold world."

"Maybe he'll turn up," I said encouragingly, "when he hears that you've——"

"Oh, no—no. Not now. I don't want to see him yet. I have my own way to make in the world; I shall never be a burden on the man I love. The thing for me to do is to build up a new life for myself and by myself, with his memory as an inspiration. Perhaps it will never be anything more; per-

haps we shall never meet again; but memories are everything to a woman. Besides, I haven't got my divorce yet; and I suppose I have to desert Frank quite a while before I can sue him, don't I?"

"What do you intend to do?" I asked. "New York is rather overstocked with dancing teams——"

"I was afraid so. Besides, the boy I was thinking of as a partner is married now—married to a perfectly impossible girl—and that all fell through. But I thought I might sell perfumes, or cigarettes—anything where taste and personality count for more than experience. I'll have money enough to set up a little shop. Or I might be an expert shopper for women who live out of town—I know a girl who makes a good living doing that. And I know I could write movie scenarios. What do you think?"

"We can take our time about it," I said as the salad arrived. "But you can count on me for anything in the world." For really she was an appealing figure as she sat there with her fingers working nervously, her eyes moist, her face lined with worry, but exalted by the enthusiasm of breaking away from a killing routine at home and coming to the big town to look for the pot of gold. It was almost like old times to be with her.

"You're a dear," said Lucile. "And this is awfully good salad."

"Where do we go from here?" I asked over the coffee.

"Well, first of all I have to find a place to stay, don't I? And I'm in such a silly predicament. You see, I didn't have very much money when I left,

and I didn't want to make Frank suspicious by asking for more just after he'd shaken me. I packed up my jewels and gave them to my maid—oh, she's the most faithful creature in the world; they're safe enough—and told her to sell them as soon as she could and mail me a money order. By the middle of the week I ought to have fifteen or twenty thousand dollars; but just now—— After I'd paid for my ticket and my meals on the train, and tipped the porters——”

She turned her purse upside-down on the tablecloth and counted up the pile of change.

“Four eighty-five. I couldn't ask this of any other man in the world, Alec, but I know you won't misunderstand. Can you lend me some money till I hear from Celestine?”

“Of course,” I began; then I reached into my pocket rather dubiously and drew out the contents. There was something more than twelve dollars, but on my plate was the bill for the luncheon; nine dollars and forty cents.

“I could run a bill at the Ritz, of course,” she said. “But then Frank would find me right away. If you can let me have fifty or a hundred I'll go to some cheap place till I hear from the jewels.”

“You can't do it to-day,” I said ruefully. “I'm broke. By the time I've tipped the waiter I'll have less than two dollars. And it's Sunday, so I can't go to the bank. To-morrow——”

Of course, she could go to any hotel and run a bill on the strength of her two suit-cases. But she was going to need all of her money, even if Celestine

didn't disappear with the jewels; and somehow I had little faith in Celestine. Lucile ought to be economical. And there were no longer any cheap hotels.

"I could ask my cousin, Mrs. Torrey, to put you up for a day or two——"

"Oh, that would be fine!"

"But she's out of town for the week-end. But—here!" A helpful idea broke in on me. I might not have welcomed it so readily if Lucile hadn't been gazing at me trustfully with a look of you-wonderful-person-I'd-be-absolutely-stumped-but-I-know-you'll-think-of-something. "I'm supposed to be out of town just now. I'm attending a convention up in Westchester. It was pure luck that I happened to come in and get your letter. And I ought to go back to-night. So why don't you take my apartment for a day or two, till your money comes? I'll be out of town all week; I'll have no need of the place; it's a convenient size, two rooms and kitchenette; and it wouldn't cost anything but any food you might buy. Then you could save all your funds for emergencies."

It had also crossed my mind that she could save my funds. She'd never been very economical, even when she was poor; and those years of ease with Pemberton had undoubtedly made her less so. With no better chance of immediate repayment, I didn't like to think of her killing off what was left of my little bank account at the Plaza or the St. Regis.

"I'd love it!" she cried softly. "So much nicer than a hotel; and Frank would never think of look-

ing for me there. And by the time you come back from your convention I'd have found a place. But would it be all right?"

"All right?"

"Wouldn't people talk? They would in Chicago, but I suppose in New York nobody ever thinks anything about——"

"My dear Lucile, the reason nobody ever thinks in New York is that nobody ever knows. Nobody in an apartment-house pays any attention to anybody else, unless they play the piano at three o'clock in the morning. I'll be out of town; you'll be there. That's all. If any of my friends call up, tell them you're subletting my apartment. Around the university everybody sublets apartments during summer-school; there's nothing out of the way about it."

"It sounds attractive," she said. "But I'll tell you what will be safer. If you're going away to-night, I'll stay there, and then you can get me some money to-morrow and I'll hunt a hotel. Will that do?"

It would do admirably. For there was this matter of the tea that I'd arranged for Tuesday. When I first suggested that Lucile take my apartment, I'd thought of merely transferring it to a hotel. But that wouldn't have suited Agnes; I remembered now, though it was hard to remember what I'd promised any one woman when I was entangled with so many, that the tea, for Agnes, had been mainly an excuse to see the apartment. There was no point in giving it at all if I didn't try to please her.

However, Lucile's proposal had arranged that.

I'd have to give up my ride to Maplecrest with Hazel—call her up this evening and tell her that Gushmore had insisted on my immediate return, or something—but that couldn't be helped. Lucile had the right of way.

As I paid the lunch check and set out to recover those wretched dogs I looked on into the future, when Lucile would be a wealthy costumer, or a famous playwright; and I—well, if I weren't in the spotlight at the final curtain, at least I'd be the guardian angel who kept her from harm, and perhaps even hunted up the man she loved and brought two fond hearts together.

The streets were hot, but the taxi ride cooled us—cooled us so agreeably that when I thought over the trip back to Maplecrest I almost made up my mind to go to a hotel in town to-night, and let Hazel pick me up there in the morning. I'd taken a terrific dislike to that railroad journey. But I didn't have money enough to go to a hotel; indeed, I computed as we neared Morningside and I looked at the taximeter that when I'd paid the chauffeur I wouldn't even have the price of a railroad ticket back to the conference.

It was humiliating to have to explain this to the woman who was depending on me, but Lucile was a good sport. She'd made her great decision, and the thrill of her adventure still carried her over the hurdles without missing a stride. We made quite a delightful bit of byplay out of the comradely necessity that she should pay for the cab.

The first real test of my value as a patron, guar-

dian angel, and dependable friend came when we disembarked in front of the apartment house and paraded haughtily into the lobby. A telephone girl and two negro hallboys, who knew me as a studious bachelor of stainless rectitude, saw me coming home with two big suitcases and two little dogs, and a girl who as an importation into the bachelor home would have aroused suspicion anywhere. It takes a good deal to disturb the bored superiority of a Jamaican hallboy, but James and Walter were obviously upset; and the telephone girl dropped her comic supplement and looked out from her seat behind the switchboard with an air of well-I'd-never-have-thought-it-of-him-but-men-are-all-alike.

"Sadie," I said severely, "this is Mrs. Pemberton, who has sublet my apartment. Hold my mail; I'll send you my forwarding address in a day or two. James, take the suitcases. Walter, Mrs. Pemberton's dogs. Look after them in the basement; she'll tell you what to feed them."

We put it over. Sadie subsided behind her desk with a sigh of disappointment, and the boys took charge of Lucile's property with the injured air that was evoked by every attempt to make them do any work. I handed the key to Lucile as she got into the elevator.

"Don't be so formal," she said; and the stage whisper in which she said it went a long way toward spoiling my carefully contrived effect. "You'll have to come up and show me where everything is and how everything works, won't you?"

“Yes, I’m coming up; but I want to telephone first.”

The elevator rose slowly out of sight, and I asked Sadie to call the Plaza. But Miss Deming, I learned, was out. Of course; Bonner was showing her the car. The girl on the other end of the wire asked if I cared to leave a message, but what I had to say was too complicated to entrust to her.

“I’ll call again,” I told her. “No, never mind the name.”

For if I left my name, and Hazel called me when she came in, she’d be answered by Lucile. And I remembered that in the old days at Wyndham we had had an amazing talent for getting caught.

XIX.

Ashes of Roses.

LUCILE hadn't had possession of the apartment for more than five minutes before I came in, but in those five minutes she had done things to it. My disordered mass of books and magazines had been reduced to neat stacks, and Lucile, with her fluffy hair disordered by the wind sweeping through the wide-flung windows, was dusting the furniture with vigor and zeal. Everything had been rearranged, it seemed to me, except that her photograph still held the place of honor.

"You were a dear to keep that," she said. "Remember the day you took it, at McAllister's Grove? Wasn't it fun to be alive then? It was sweet of you to treasure it so. Poor boy! I gave you a pretty bad time, didn't I?"

She stopped, dustrag in hand, and looked at me with an affectionate sympathy that was full payment for all my worries.

"Well!" she exclaimed after our eyes had met and held each other and then dropped hastily. "I love your apartment, but I never saw such a scandalous disorderly mess as your table. It may be all right for a professor, but no woman would stand it. If anybody ever needed the home-maker's touch——"

The dustrag went into action again.

To be on the safe side, I ought to have gone away at once. But it was pleasant to see a pretty girl flitting about my monastic cliff dwelling, even if she was reducing it to inconvenient respectability and putting things where I'd never find them. Besides, we'd only begun to tell each other what had been happening in seven years. So I kept out of the way while she reorganized the living room, and then disappeared into the bedroom to do something to her hair and reappear with a rather pathetic air of weariness.

"Let's sit down and have a smoke," she suggested. "This is the first housekeeping I've done in years. Even at the camp, Frank always had to have three or four servants about. And no man can know what a joy it is to come back to the everyday duties of keeping a little house after the oppressive luxury of a great establishment. I wasn't meant for a wealthy hostess, Alec; I was meant for the simple life of the home . . .

"You've changed, Alec. Oh, you're still your dear loyal self, but you look so serious, and learned, and—haven't you some gray hair? I never thought—— Do you remember——"

Well, when any two classmates who were together almost all the time in college meet again for their first real talk in years, they're likely to take up a good deal of time running over things they did back in the old days. Even if those two were once engaged to be married, they can find plenty of reminiscences to keep them away from dangerous topics.

When I finally looked at my watch it was ten minutes to six.

“Good Heavens, I ought to be going. My train leaves at 8:45, and we ought to go out somewhere and get some dinner first.”

I stopped, in consternation. I had something like twenty-five cents left, over and above the price of my railroad ticket. Lucile had paid for the taxi; she wouldn't have more than a couple of dollars, and it wouldn't do to leave her without a cent.

“Oh, let's don't go out,” she protested while I was consternating. “It's too hot—and we haven't the price of a decent meal between us. I can still cook, Alec, and your kitchenette looks workable. Let's have a little supper up here, just by ourselves. Wouldn't you like to?”

“But there's no food in the house.”

“Plenty of it in the delicatessens. You could get some cold ham and salad; you have coffee and flour, so I could make nice hot biscuits——”

Far-shooting recollection smote me over the gap of seven years. The grotesque Fate that had killed that passionate ecstasy I used to feel in her mere presence—killed it dead—stirred me with memory as keen as yesterday of the hot biscuits she used to bake for our picnic parties. Desire for those biscuits overcame me. There was a delicatessen store around the corner; Lucile made up a long list of what she wanted and I set out.

Ours is a domestic neighborhood, full of teachers and graduate students, their wives and offspring. I'd seen the regular evening pilgrimage of married

persons to the delicatessens that could be found on the street floor of almost every apartment house—seen it a thousand times; but I'd never been in it before. Now, as I stood in line with my married neighbors, and spoke up when my turn came for ham and pastry and pimento cheese, I felt as if the rice were rolling off my hat.

Yet I met no one I knew till I was coming out to the street, my arms loaded with bundles and a bottle of olives protruding from a coat pocket; and thus burdened with the provender for an unacknowledged household I ran right into Professor McCabe. He was carrying a brown paper parcel that looked like roast beef, and a paper bucket full of ice cream, and he came near dropping both when he saw me.

"Why, Deupree, this is luck! I thought you were out of town for a week or so."

"Oh, I am," I told him. "But it happened I had to come back just for the day. I've been trying to do a little work on the book, but I'm hardly started yet——"

"By George, I'm glad you came back. I've been thinking, since I saw you last—— I believe the ordinary interpretation of that passage in Vitruvius that we were speaking of—you remember, the one about the roofs—is altogether wrong. I'll just run up to your apartment and go over the passage with you——"

I almost dropped a chocolate layer cake. McCabe was no unworldly scholar. He knew the times he lived in, and the people who lived in them. If he'd found an aged and ugly woman he might have swal-

lowed the story that she'd sublet the apartment; but Lucile——!

"Why, the fact is," I stammered, "that I—I'm having a sort of party this evening. Just a few friends, and so on; everything's upset—I doubt if I could find my Vitruvius without hunting for an hour——"

"I could explain in five minutes," he persisted, "and we'd better get the point straightened out."

"Time enough next week," I said, walking away from him. I knew exactly what he was thinking—that I had a party going on, and that the guests were drunk. But I couldn't help that. I slunk around the corner—and met Frances, face to face.

"Why, I thought you were up in Westchester!" she cried.

"You see I'm not," I observed bitterly.

Her face lighted.

"Alec—Jerome telephoned to me from Maplecrest this morning, and told me all the news, and everything. Have you—have you dished that woman?"

"Dished what woman?"

"The one you had at the Hanging Gardens. Jerome said she was up at Maplecrest, but that you seemed to be trying to avoid her. I think it's awfully decent of you, but I don't want to be a dog in the manger, you know. If you're really playing fair with her——"

Then she noticed my parcels.

"Come up to the apartment and have supper with Rachel and me," she proposed. "I was going out

to get some things to eat, but I see you've got them. You're no caterer, Alec; I can make a supper nine times better than you could out of what you've got in your arms. And we've got some gin, and we could play some bridge, or dance to the phonograph——"

"No, I can't do it. I—I have to work on my book."

Her eyes sparkled; life had a new interest.

"Alec, is that woman in your apartment?"

"The lady whom you so ungraciously describe as that woman is *not* in my apartment. She's at Maplecrest Inn. If you don't believe me, call up Jerome and ask him. If you won't believe your husband, ask the manager of the hotel."

Her face fell.

"Then you're all alone?"

If I told her that I had male guests, she'd want me to bring them over.

"Yes," I said firmly, "I'm alone."

"Then, you poor thing, I'm not going to let you fuss around, trying to get your own supper. Come on up and eat with us. Oh, if you're afraid of Rachel I'll send her out to a restaurant, if you like, and you and I can dine alone. I can trust you."

I thought that if she trusted me, I could safely repeat that I had to work on my book. Unhappy thought, misleading inspiration.

"Alec, if we can't be lovers, we can at least be friends, can't we? If you've got somebody upstairs you might have told me at first. I'm no old aunty. You've hurt me terribly. No, not by what you're

doing—your life is your own affair. But by your lack of confidence in me——”

“And there,” I said in exasperation, “you do me wrong. I’d never hold out a piece of scandal on you; it would be inhuman cruelty. But there is no scandal——”

She shrugged.

“You’ll never have to refuse an invitation from me again. I—why, Alec, I was fool enough to be flattered, when I first learned that you loved me; but when I find that you’re always chasing women, running around with one after another——”

I left her talking, but the episode gave me such a guilty feeling that when I came into the lobby and found none of the servants in sight I didn’t have the courage to ring for the elevator. They’d seen me take ostentatious departure fifteen minutes earlier; it would only set them wondering if they saw me come back loaded with all the ammunition for a party.

I’d meant to call Hazel from a telephone booth while I was out, but had forgotten it. I could call her from the apartment, of course, but that would mean explanations to Lucile; and I was tired of explaining. And though I could call from down here, it would mean bringing Sadie back to the switchboard to start wondering. Hazel could wait; if I could get upstairs unseen, so much the better. So I tiptoed to the stairway and walked up ten flights—no small sacrifice, to protect the fair name of a lady. But when I finally stumbled in, exhausted, I found that Lucile, too, had been busy.

"It's so terribly hot," she apologized. "And I thought so long as I wasn't going anywhere, and there was nobody here but you, I might as well be comfortable. Do you think it's all right?"

Any man would have thought it was all right. She'd changed into a negligée of canary silk, and yellow slippers with fluffy pompons. I'd have been willing to climb ten flights of stairs every night with a double armload of food, if a vision like that waited for me; but it was lucky I'd sidetracked McCabe.

The sun had dropped behind the Jersey hills by the time the meal was ready; but that supper, eaten in romantic dusk, lit only by a couple of floor lamps and the glow from distant street lights reflected on the ceiling, was worth the wait. When it was all gone but the coffee and cigarettes I pulled my Morris chair up to the window, and Lucile piled two or three cushions on its wide arm and perched herself beside my shoulder. The sky sparkled with stars; now and then a beam of glaring whiteness, thrown from a searchlight on one of the battleships in the river, swept across the upper floors of the rampart of apartment-houses. Strolling groups in summer clothing made blotches of white on the gray, lamp-lined avenue below; across the airshaft somebody drew two or three rippling chords from a piano.

"This has been the first really happy day I've known in weeks," said Lucile softly. "Funny, isn't it, when all my future is so uncertain? But I suppose that's the only way to really enjoy life—living just from day to day."

"Day to day is all right," I muttered absently.

"But living from minute to minute is rather wearing." For I was beginning to worry again about Hazel; I'd have to get her on the phone before I left.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Lucile suddenly. "You had a phone call while you were out. A Mrs. Clevenger."

"Mrs. Clevenger? What did you tell her?"

"Just what you told me to—that you were at a convention up in Westchester, and that I'd sublet your apartment—— Why, Alec! What have I done?"

"Nothing," I groaned. "That is, nothing that was your fault. Only, if anybody else calls up, pretend to be the switchboard girl, and tell them that Mr. Deupree's apartment doesn't answer."

"What's the matter?" she demanded. "Who is Mrs. Clevenger?"

"Don't you remember? The memorial dining hall, and——"

"Oh, that woman! What in the world is she calling you for?"

"It isn't what she's calling me for—it's where she's calling me from. She's at the conference, and she undoubtedly wondered why I wasn't."

"Oh, damn!" said Lucile. "I *am* a little fool, Alec."

"But, my dear, you couldn't help it." And I thought I'd better tell her about Agnes, and why I was supposed to stay close to her side. Lucile understood; she knew that Wyndham was always short of money; she realized what a women's dormitory,

and a memorial gateway, and half a million on the endowment fund would mean. She didn't know, of course, that Agnes had changed, and I saw no reason for telling her that I was going to spend the next week in the company of a woman better looking and better dressed than herself.

"Well, I hope I haven't done any harm," she sighed. "But you're clever; you can get out of it some way. And it's too bad you have to waste so much time with that awful frump. Tell me, Alec—I haven't any right to ask you this, but I'm going to ask you, anyway. Are you—are you in love with anybody?"

If I had been on the witness stand, I should certainly have waited for somebody to object to that question, and at any cost I'd have avoided a yes-or-no answer. I didn't want to commit myself, with the awful possibilities of this week ahead of me. However, there was no one to object to the question, and it had to be yes or no.

"No," I said.

"Have you been, since we left college? But of course you have!"

"As it happens, I haven't. It seems that nobody ever thinks of me in that way."

"I wondered," she said. "I wondered. Somehow I felt that you'd always be loyal to your ideals. You're that way, Alec. You know, I've always loved you—not like—like the man I told you about, of course. But it's no wonder I misunderstood it, when I first began to like you a great deal, back in college. You're the only man in the world with

whom I could spend an evening like this without feeling that I was doing something just a bit—indiscreet. Not many men could be trusted like this, Alec. But you make everything seem so safe, somehow.”

“You didn’t always think that,” I said angrily, losing my temper along with the recollection of things that should not be said.

“We were always getting caught, weren’t we?” she laughed. “Oh, listen! Remember?”

The lady across the airshaft was playing the barcarole from the “Tales of Hoffmann.” It had been a favorite of ours in college, and Lucile began to sing softly:

“Belle nuit, ô nuit d’amour,
Souris à nos ivresses;
Nuit plus tendre que le jour,
O belle nuit d’amour——”

Somehow, this shattered the wistful charm of the evening for me. I’d rather outgrown heavy sentiment; and I should have supposed that Lucile had outgrown it too.

Or, if she had outgrown it, and was merely thinking back—I began to feel a little uneasy at her thinking back in that particular way. What about this man she was in love with? It was all right to laugh a little and cry a little over the dead past, and strew flowers on the grave, but to attempt a resurrection was another matter. Not that I objected seriously to a resurrection; but I didn’t want to think about

it just now. Before I got around to resurrections I had to think up some explanation for Agnes; I had to get Hazel on the phone; not to mention a large and vindictive husband that Lucile would have to get rid of—And my tea! Lucile would have to get out before then.

Some of the strollers in the street below had heard her and stopped to listen. It was a long way down, and the apartment was dark; but I wondered how much they could see. For there were many people in the neighborhood who knew me; and if a scholarly young bachelor is seen sitting shamelessly in the window of his apartment, on Sunday evening, with a beautiful young woman in a yellow kimono perched on the arm of his chair, singing a song that does its best to throb with passion, there are those who will entertain unworthy suspicions.

Still, it was pretty dark. But just then one of the searchlights swept along the wall and blinded us for a moment; it flooded the whole apartment with light, and Lucile got up hastily and sat down away from the window. I experienced a sense of relief, and reminded her that it must be time for me to be leaving if I wanted to get back to Maplecree.

“Oh, what a shame, Alec! Can’t you stay a little longer? When does your train go?”

I got the time-table out of my pocket and looked at it—looked at it two or three times to make sure I wasn’t mistaken.

“It doesn’t seem to go on Sundays,” I said. “Seven-twenty is the last one.”

"Oh," said Lucile. "Then you can't go up to-night! Well, that's rather nice; it doesn't spoil our evening."

"No," I admitted, "it doesn't spoil our evening. But it may spoil some other things. I wonder—— Why, of course! Why didn't I think of that?"

"Think of what?"

"We haven't the price of a hotel room for me between us," I explained. "But Billy Bonner, just across the hall, is a friend of mine. He'll put me up over night. And he usually carries several hundred dollars around with him, so he can cash a check and I can lend you enough to keep you going."

"Will he be at home on Sunday night? I mean, till terribly late?"

"He may be; he's very unconventional. Yes, that helps matters immeasurably. I might have found it hard to get money at Maplecrest, and the bank wouldn't have been open by the time I have to leave in the morning."

"Why do you have to go so early?" Lucile demanded. "There are still lots and lots of things that I want to ask you. Can't you stay and have breakfast with me, and go up later?"

Well, of course I could wait for the noon train. But I felt that one thing at a time was all that I could handle. I'd have to break my appointment with Hazel anyway, as a matter of precaution; but if I lingered with Lucile there was no telling when I'd get started. And there was no point in allow-

ing Agnes to think thoughts longer than was necessary.

“No, I have to get away early,” I said. “Now I’d be glad to have you stay here all week——”

“Well? Of course, if you get me some money I can go to a hotel to-morrow, but——”

“I think you’d better,” I said. “For I’ve invited some people to tea on Tuesday, and they might not understand.”

“Then I’ll get out to-morrow morning,” said Lucile, “and hunt up some quiet little hotel. Only I hope you’ll let me come back to your tea?”

“My dear,” I said nervously, “you’d be bored to death. They won’t be very interesting people.”

“Oh,” she sniffed, “if you don’t want me to come—— But I thought it would be nice to begin meeting people right away; I want to get acquainted in New York, you know.”

What could I say? The safest way out seemed to be to assure her that I’d be delighted to have her among those present, and to-morrow I could think up some excuse for calling the whole thing off.

“You’re a dear,” she said, and yawned through her smile. I realized that she had had a hard day and that I’d better hunt up Bonner. And when I told her so, her protests were so drowsy that she had to laugh at them herself.

“Sleep late,” I advised her. “I’ll slip the money under your door, and see you at five on Tuesday. But try not to remember where things are in the apartment; we don’t want to rouse any suspicions, you know.”

"All right," she smiled. "Good night, Alec. And—thank you so much, dear boy."

There was an awkward pause. I didn't particularly want to kiss her, and I suppose she didn't want to kiss me, but each of us was afraid of disappointing the other. So we came together, and just as our lips met my door-bell clattered with such infernal suddenness that we let go of each other and sprang six feet apart.

"We're always getting caught," she wailed.

With an effort I recovered my nerve; the vindictive husband couldn't be so close on her trail. I pushed her back into the living-room, switched off the light, and opened the door. It was Bonner, dusty and begrimed.

"Say, Doc——" he began; and then a white glare from that miserable searchlight swept through the whole place, and Bonner looked over my shoulder and perceived a beautiful brunette—a very beautiful brunette—in a yellow negligée and disheveled hair, trying to find a place to hide.

"Excuse me," he said with emphasis.

No Deupree could endure a misunderstanding like that; and besides, Lucile's name had to be protected. I dragged him across the threshold and turned the light on.

"Don't be a fool," I snarled. "It isn't that at all. I want you to meet the lady who has sublet my apartment."

As I said it I felt that the explanation was not all that might be required. And Lucile broke in hastily—

"It isn't exactly that, you see. But Doctor Deupree and I are old friends, and I've just come to New York and had no place to go——"

Apparently this was no better, to judge from Bonner's expression of why-think-it-necessary-to-keep-up-pretenses-with-me-I-too-am-human.

"She's here for only a few days," I cried frantically. "And I want to spend the night with you, if you don't mind. A motor party is calling for me in the morning, and I'll have to get up earlier than——"

And this was no better. Lucile's nerves had stood many strains that day, and at last they snapped. Bonner had hardly begun some reassuring remark when she broke out with a petulant, hysterical—

"Oh, go away! Go away! I hate you both!"

"All right," I agreed. "You're all tired out. And I'll leave the money in the morning."

The consciousness that even this remark had a guilty ring kept me silent till Bonner had shut his door behind us.

"Havin' a little fuss?" he inquired. "Well, Doc, you'll find they're pretty much all alike."

"Bonner," I said earnestly, "for God's sake let me explain. You are thinking things that—that have no justification, about a woman who is absolutely spotless. It's an unfortunate affair. This girl is an old friend of mine. She's just left her husband, and since she was broke and had no place to go I offered her a—a home for a few days, till she can get herself settled. And of course I want to avoid the least appearance——"

"Ah, I see. Yes, Doc, you're right about that. As long as she's got the goods on her husband there's no use pullin' anything that would look bad in a counter suit. Particularly for a man with your job. You don't want to get mixed up in it any more than you can help, till she's all clear. Of course you can usually get away with murder in these apartment-houses, but you don't want to take too big a chance. Well, Doc, I'll go on the stand and swear I never saw the least thing suspicious. You can count on me to the limit."

"Some day," I said gently, "I am going to explain. But not to-night. It will take a week. Just at present all I ask is that you put me up over night, and cash a check for a hundred dollars."

"I can do that. More if you want it."

So I took a hundred for Lucile and fifty for myself, and I put her money in an envelope, slipped it under my own door, and came back and set Bonner's alarm-clock for half-past seven.

"I ought to lend you some money," he said, "for I made a sale to-day, thanks to you."

"Miss Deming?"

"The same. Had her and her hard-faced friend out around Ronkonkoma and Camp Upton and thereabouts, in the speedster; and she mails me a check in the morning. But believe me, Doc, this day was pretty near my last!"

"Did Mrs. Whitlow talk you to death?"

"From the back seat, when we were goin' as fast as the traffic allows? No, Doc, she spent all her time holdin' on, and thought she was damn lucky to

do that. But this girl—— Ever hear of Axel Hammarstrom, the big Swede that lives down at Cedarhurst?"

"I suppose I've heard the name, but I can't place him."

"You're lucky. People that place him, or that he places, are mostly laid away in Woodlawn. They call him the Headless Horseman of the Merrick Road. Drives a big racin' car, and thinks he's put to shame if he ever does under sixty. Likes to turn corners at his best speed without lookin' to see if anybody's in the way; holds the middle of the road and lets other people climb the fence. You could get away with that in the old days, far enough from town; but now the Sunday traffic on the South Shore is as heavy as on the Avenue.

"But traffic means nothing to him. Let 'em get out of his way—that's all. He's a devil. Got everybody scared. Been in six or seven smashes, but he's somebody's friend, so he keeps his license and stays out of jail."

"And he upset you and Hazel?" I cried. "Was she hurt?"

"No, she wasn't hurt. Let me tell you. We were goin' along a nice smooth stretch of road beyond Central Islip, with the girl at the wheel, when I see something comin' toward us. One look, and I knew him; he drove one of my demonstrators up against a tree last year, smashed a car, and blew us to eight hundred dollars' hospital bills. I was scared, I don't mind sayin'. When that bird is on the road, I want to be in the surf at Long Beach.

“ ‘Look out for him,’ I says to the girl. ‘That’s Hammarstrom.’ ‘Who’s Hammarstrom?’ she says. ‘He’s a big Swede that thinks he owns the road,’ I tell her, ‘and it takes a better man than me to say he don’t. He’s killed three or four already. Gimme the wheel and we’ll turn out.’

“ ‘Did she give me the wheel? Not her! By this time he was gettin’ close, too.

“ ‘Killed three or four already, has he?’ she says. ‘Well, well, well. Thinks the road belongs to him, does he? We’ll see about that.’ And with that she drives straight at him—aimin’ right between his front wheels. Doc, I could hear ‘em singin’ ‘Lead, Kindly Light.’ I don’t know what Hammarstrom thought, but she went right for him; and at the last minute he lost his nerve and spun his wheel out and jumped the ditch. There was nothing but a barbwire fence in his way, the lucky devil, and the last I saw over my shoulder he was hoppin’ across a hay field on two wheels with some little chance of gettin’ stopped before he spilled himself. And this mild little friend of yours only says, ‘Well, maybe he’ll give other people some of the road after this.’ Yes, I sold her a car. Before the week’s over she’ll be drivin’ it. But she never drives my car again.”

I picked up his telephone.

“ ‘And she was going to drive me up to Maplecrest to-morrow morning! You may not believe it, but I was going to call it off, anyway.’ ”

I got the Plaza, I called Hazel’s apartment. But it was Mrs. Whitlow’s voice that answered.

“ ‘The child’s asleep,’ she snarled, and I knew

that she had been asleep, too. "Do you think I'm goin' to wake her up for you? Not much, young man."

"Well, then," I begged desperately, "tell her I can't——"

There was a click in my ear; Sarah had hung up. I considered, then jiggled the hook till the hall boy on night duty answered me.

"Walter, this is Mr. Deupree speaking. I'm spending the night in Mr. Bonner's apartment; mine is sublet. You'll have a call for me in the morning. Call me here, at Mr. Bonner's. Be sure to make no mistake. Mr. Bonner's apartment—118."

"Yes, sir. I'll do that, sir."

Convinced that I had made a creditable strategic retreat, I turned back to meet Bonner's quizzical eye, and blushed.

"Doc, I warned you they were a lot of trouble, didn't I? What's become of the fat blonde? She was all right but her frame of mind. This Deming girl's a jewel, but I'd as soon travel in the lions' cage as play around with her. I guess you know all of that, eh? For on top of these two, here you go and turn up with this little lady in yellow—Doc, you're a sheik."

XX.

Improvisations in B Sharp.

IN the cool dimness of morning I opened my eyes in a room that I was too drowsy to identify, and lay for a while in delightful ease, not knowing or caring how I had been awakened—only wondering lazily where I was. Presently I remembered asking Bonner for shelter; then this must be Bonner's apartment, and across the airshaft on which the window opened was my own—

At this point I became conscious of the faint, insistent ringing of a bell beyond the airshaft. There was something familiar about its sound; and now I dimly remembered another bell that had tinkled near me, some time ago, and brought me to half wakefulness. It ought to have reminded me of something, I knew; but I was too comfortably half asleep to wonder what, or to try to find a meaning in the intermittent remarks of a peevish, sleepy voice that came to my ears from across the airshaft.

"Hello . . . ! Yes—this is Doctor Deupree's apartment. Wha-at . . . ? You want Doctor Deupree . . . ? Who is this, please . . . ? Hazel who . . . ? Hold the wire; I'll see if he's awake."

A door opened, soft-shod feet shuffled in the hallway outside. Then the doorbell of Bonner's apart-

ment rattled like a steam hammer. I woke up suddenly and completely, sprang out of bed, and opened the door.

Lucile stood in the hallway, heavy-eyed and yawning—her feet insecurely shod in slippers that were half fallen off, her yellow negligée hurriedly thrown over her nightgown and held together with a clutching hand. And I suppose I looked fully as slumbrous and irritated as she did, for we glared angrily at each other for a good five seconds before she said:

“Somebody named Hazel says she’s waiting for you.”

“Why didn’t you tell her she had the wrong apartment? She’ll think——”

“What do I care what she thinks? I don’t know her. Who is Hazel, anyway? And what does she want?”

“She’s come to take me up to the conference.”

“Oh, she’s the party, is she? Well, you might have had her call Bonner, instead of waking me up.”

“It was that fool hallboy,” I said angrily. “I told Walter to send the call here, but I suppose James is on this morning, and Walter forgot to tell him. Yes, that’s it. James is on.”

“Everybody in the house will be on if you don’t shut up,” growled a peevish voice from Bonner’s bedroom. “If you’ve got to fight, go over and fight in your own apartment.”

Lucile and I glared at each other with the bitterness of those who have been waked too soon.

“Well?” she demanded. “Are you going to talk to Hazel?”

"No," I barked. "Tell her I'll be down in ten minutes."

As I dived into Bonner's bathroom I heard the muffled murmur of her voice, and the bang of a receiver slammed on the hook. Somehow I managed to make my appearance reasonably presentable in ten minutes, but my heart had turned to mush. What would I say to Hazel?

For while I was getting used to misunderstandings, there was a difference between Frances and Hazel. When Fan misunderstood I was angry at her, when Hazel misunderstood I was angry at myself. I wasn't good at explanations, and she might not even wait for an explanation. She might disappear in a cloud of harsh remarks and gasoline smoke. And when I came out and found the car at the curb, with Sarah sitting up stiff and uncompromising in the little locker behind, I gave up hope. If Sarah knew, all was over.

But evidently Sarah didn't know. Sarah nodded stiffly as I passed her and went forward to greet Hazel, to stand up and hear my sentence . . . She sat at the wheel, in a cocky little hat and a green sport frock, and smiled down at me.

"Hello! It was a shame to get you up so early, wasn't it? But the fresh air will wake you up."

And that was all, positively all. Uncomprehending but tremendously relieved, I climbed in beside her, and our party started out on its pleasure trip to Maplecrest. We drove in a heavy silence. Sarah was in the rear, where any remarks she might have made would be blown away by the wind. I

thought the less I said the better, and Hazel was too busy to talk—busy working the car northward, with short spurts and sudden jolting stops as the brakes ground and horns clamored before or beside us; working out of town against the endless stream of Monday morning traffic, week-enders coming back into town. Aside from the repeated observation that we might as well have walked, she said nothing till we were miles out of town and able to venture a little more speed.

But she was an alert and careful driver; she took few chances with us and none with other people. What she had done to the Headless Horseman was evidently no precedent; Hazel wasn't headless.

"At last," she muttered when we had begun to draw clear of the worst congestion. "I was afraid we wouldn't get there in time for lunch."

"But now that that danger's over," I dared to propose, "it isn't too much to suggest that we stop for breakfast, is it?"

"Oh, you poor thing! Haven't you had anything to eat? But of course—your sister said you were asleep when I called."

My heart gave one big leap of joy, and then for a moment the angels and devils—the Deuprees and the Gaylords—fought for my soul. The sister idea, said the Tempter, was wonderful luck. I ought to play it hard. But I had scruples about that; I didn't want to lie to Hazel. Besides, she'd soon find out that I had no sister.

Well, why not brazen it out? Hazel was a sophisticated person; she certainly didn't suppose that the

men she liked were all rigidly ascetic. Why should I be an exception? There was no chance that she'd ever identify the girl.

But I wanted to be an exception.

"That wasn't my sister," I said uncomfortably, while the Deupree conscience rose up in triumph and began to sing hymns. "I haven't any sister. That was a girl in hard luck whom I'd sent into my apartment, because she had nowhere else to go. I was staying with Bonner, across the hall. It's a long story——"

"Don't tell me any more. I mean, don't feel that you have to tell me any more. I knew it was all right."

"To the pure all things are pure," I quoted.

"Then I must be impure," she sighed, "for I see a lot that fills my innocent child-mind with suspicion. But I'm not suspicious of you, Alec."

"No, I want to tell you all about it. That is, if you don't mind——"

"Oh, I'm dying with curiosity, of course."

So I told her the story, or the principal parts of it; and when I had finished she drew a long breath and looked at me with the green eyes that were no longer opaque, but clear and flickering.

"I think it was awfully dear of you," she said. "But a little awkward, don't you think? Because people would misunderstand."

"But we never expected anybody would have a chance to misunderstand. I didn't expect to miss my train, and—and everything. Oh, yes; it was

awkward. But we were broke; and when you're broke awkward things are apt to happen."

"I know. We used to be poor. But couldn't you have taken her to Mrs. Torrey's?"

"She's out of town."

"That's so; I forgot. But your other friends?"

"My other friends," I said in the bitterness of understanding, "are a trifle less friendly even than Edith, in matters like this."

"Now don't lump us all together," said Hazel severely. "If you'd only phoned to me—— Oh, yes, I was out of town in the afternoon, but I got back about eight. I'd have put her up; six rooms for her, six rooms for Sarah, six rooms for me."

"Yes," I reflected, "I suppose you would. You're that kind. But, Heaven forgive me, I didn't have sense enough to know you were that kind. I wouldn't have dared. Besides, she's a proud little person. I've an idea she'd rather——"

"Rather borrow the apartment of a man she knows than accept the hospitality of a woman he knows," Hazel supplied. "Yes, I think I know her. Then she's going away to-day?"

"Yes," I said, "she's going away to-day. Of course, I'll still be her guide, philosopher, and friend——"

"And hero——"

"No, I'm not the hero. I forgot to tell you about that. Apparently she fell in love with some fellow in Chicago last winter. They were both tremendously self-sacrificing; neither would ask the other

to give up everything—reputation, and so on. But now that she's given up everything else of her own accord, and they can save their reputations——”

“Always a good thing to save, isn't it? Unromantic but useful. And where is he now?”

“I don't know,” I admitted. “He had the decency to take himself out of her life when everything looked hopeless.”

“But now that it looks hopeful you expect him to come back?”

“Well,” I suggested, “he'll probably hear about her leaving her husband eventually; and then I suppose he'll write to her, and after she's got her divorce they'll get married.”

“And until then?”

“Until then she'll be working at—at something or other. She wants to make her own way. I merely stand by to help her if she needs it. I'd like to see her happy.”

“Of course you would,” said Hazel. “Well, I'm glad you told me all about it. Though even if you hadn't, I wouldn't have believed there was anything wrong. You're not that kind.”

Here was another woman who instinctively trusted me, and for once I was glad of it. It helped things out materially.

But Hazel's easy confidence that I couldn't be wicked was balanced by the fact, which became clear shortly afterward, that Sarah distrusted me as much as ever. When we'd run ten or fifteen miles out of town Hazel charitably decided that she was hungry again, so we turned in at a little roadhouse and

breakfasted at a gravelly garden under the trees. Sarah, after her enforced silence on the trip, was full of things that she wanted to say—most of them with a slanting reflection on the character of young men in the effete East; particularly young men who when called for at the almost meridian hour of eight A. M. are still asleep. I was glad when the check was paid, Sarah's attempt to maneuver me into the back seat was circumvented, and we were once more on the way to Maplecrest.

"You're drivin' a lot too fast," was Sarah's parting caution as we set out. "Twenty miles an hour is aplenty. You hear me, now."

"I hear her," said Hazel, as we watched the speedometer skipping merrily up through the forties. "Wait till I get my Sagamore; then you'll see some real speed."

"But for Heaven's sake be careful!" I implored her, rather surprised to find that I felt so worried. "Bonner told me what you did yesterday——"

"Oh, that was nothing. I didn't think this Hamersley—Hammarstrom—whatever his name is—had any real nerve. And he didn't."

"But if he hadn't turned out——"

"Well, he'd never have driven anybody else off the road." So there was no more argument on that.

"You ought to go easy on that sort of thing," I said presently, "for the sake of Sarah. You may like it, but I don't imagine she does. Unless you're trying to terrorize her—make her stay at home——"

"Not a chance. Wherever duty calls, there's Sarah."

"I wish she hadn't joined this excursion," I said peevishly. Hazel glanced slantwise at me.

"Don't you wish we could slip away from her after we get to Maplecrest," she proposed, "and take a long drive up the river by ourselves?"

Didn't I wish it? I'd do anything for it. But those spiked prison walls of responsibility hedged me in.

"I have to make a speech to-night," I said sadly, "and in common decency I ought to make an appearance at the afternoon session. I've cut everything since the first night, and as long as I let myself in for this thing I might as well take my medicine. But how about this? I come third on the evening program. After the afternoon meeting is over we'll dodge Sarah somehow, and slip off to some place up the river and have dinner at a roadhouse—they're sprinkled all the way along. And then we can run back in time for my speech. Will that do?"

"I'd love it. But what about Mrs. Clevenger?"

Ah, yes. What about Mrs. Clevenger? I hadn't thought of Mrs. Clevenger since yesterday evening. Last night I could think of nobody but Lucile; this morning of nobody but Hazel; this afternoon, very likely, of nobody but Agnes. My heart was monogamous, but transferably monogamous. Any one blotted out the others, for the time being.

And this afternoon was certainly Agnes's turn to blot. I had much to explain and more to atone for, and I hadn't even begun to plan how to do it. When we reached Maplecrest I'd have to leave Hazel to herself and devote the afternoon to getting back

into favor with Agnes. Still, if I worked hard, and my explanations got over, I ought to be able to steal a couple of hours at dinner-time.

"I don't want to come between you and your duty," said Hazel.

"It seems to me," I discovered, "that what I most need is somebody who will come between me and my duty. It may save my soul. When we get to this hotel I'll introduce you to the one or two human beings present—men who can amuse you; and then I'll leave you flat and lunch with Mrs. Clevenger, and go to this afternoon session, and all that. Then I'll be able to run away with you for dinner."

"You poor thing, I should think you'd never want to see a woman again. But I won't be horrid. I think your idea is positively brilliant; you take the widow to lunch, and then if you can't get away from her at dinner, you just say so, and we'll let it go."

That was more than Agnes or Lucile would have done.

So presently we drove into the grounds, and up the long winding avenue under the maples. The morning session was over, and lunch was not yet served; the wide verandas, the walks through the grounds, were thick with strolling delegates, super-delegates, speakers, reporters, and prowling wolves looking for persons of great wealth and benevolent inclinations. I looked them over with growing apprehension. I didn't want Agnes to see me—not yet; not with Hazel. I hadn't begun to think up explanations, and the less I had to explain on the spur of the moment, the better.

Hazel looked them over, too.

"I was afraid after we started," she said amiably, "that maybe this little sport dress wouldn't do. Oh, yes, it's this year's style; but I thought maybe your conference dressed up like a peace conference, or something. But these people——"

"They do their best," I told her, "and you see what that is. Oh, there are a few exceptions, and perhaps half of them dress for dinner; but half of them don't."

"And you'll have to to-night," she added, "because you're going to make a speech. But so long as we're going to run away for dinner I suppose I'll be all right."

"All right, you young hypocrite?" I laughed. "Look at these women. You'd outclass them in a bungalow apron."

"Flattery increases the blood pressure," said Hazel, "and that's bad when you're driving. Anyway, I see one well-dressed woman on the veranda."

So did I. I saw her and knew her. Agnes in a rose frock and a white hat, talking to a group of other women, luckily with her back toward us. Where was Wyman?

"Let's get past the mob," I suggested nervously. "Back around on this side you'll find the hotel garage. And you can let me out under the portico——"

She had to slow down, just then, to make way for a car coming out. Somebody on the porch remarked about us—we must have been a curious trio, to the stranger's eye—and other people turned to look.

Agnes turned . . . and nodded with a gracious smile.

Beside me, I heard Hazel catch in her breath; then she snapped a whiplike question.

“Who’s that?”

I didn’t dare look at her as I confessed: “That’s my widow—Mrs. Clevenger.”

“The old lady,” said Hazel, her voice as soft as the silken bowstring that twists, and strangles, and never lets go.

When she let me out an instant later, under the huge pillared entrance, I knew that I had more things to explain. But the immediate duty was to hunt Agnes. I went into the lobby, and was almost knocked down by a rush of young men. Hershfield, the last of the lot, recognized me and stopped.

“Wait a minute, fellows. Say, Alec, was that Hazel Deming? Smith of the Tribune thought so——”

“That’s who it was. But don’t chase her to the garage—she’s coming in.”

“Yes, but we don’t want to miss her. This conference has quit being news and quit being funny; and there isn’t much hope of a fight. But this girl’s always news. If we can get her to tell us what she thinks of it——”

They were gone; and when I saw Hazel again they surrounded her, in close order; they talked to her, and tried to interrupt each other; and if everything they were trying to say to her was mere interviewing, then newspapermen are less human than I have usually found them.

But that was later. Agnes was the business of the moment. I took my courage into my hands and marched out to the veranda, where Agnes sat in a rocker. Agnes at her best, stately and a shade voluptuous, her satiny white throat rising from the rose frock, her golden hair glinting through the lace of her hat; her chair the center of a semi-circle of women whose faces turned toward her as the sunflower toward the sun; Agnes enthroned and dominant, pavilioned in splendor and girdled with praise. I felt like one obliged to break through the thorny ring to the sleeping beauty, and none the happier because my beauty was far from asleep.

But these people seemed to anticipate Agnes's wishes, and it was plain from the way she flung her whole attention on me as I appeared that she wished to talk to me. One by one they left their chairs and slipped away—all but one, a woman of no particular age, appearance, calling, occupation, or importance; the most colorless, nondescript person I ever saw. If she deserved any description at all she might have been likened to a wisp of fog, a gray ghost. Certainly she was the perfect foil for Agnes's splendor of rose and white and gold.

Agnes greeted me with a look that undoubtedly meant something, but what it meant I couldn't tell. She was coming along; a week ago her emotions couldn't be concealed.

"I owe you a thousand apologies," I began.

"I wondered where you were. Miss Spivey, this is Dr. Deupree, of whom I have told you so much. We are very old friends. He speaks to-night . . .

Well, Doctor, did you have a pleasant week-end in town?"

Darwin was right . . . There was malice in her tone, a malice that lies in ambush, that waits its time.

"It was frightfully dull," I assured her. "I was most unlucky to miss you; more unlucky, perhaps, to meet Dr. McCabe, the head of the university's Latin department, five minutes after I'd found you gone."

"Was he at the Ritz?"

"No," I explained nervously, realizing that Agnes was learning to cross-examine. "I happened to meet him on Forty-second Street, and he was very insistent that I must take a day off to discuss my book with him. He's very much interested, of course——"

"I should think he might have permitted you to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest. However, that is doubtless not the New York idea. So I suppose you spent yesterday working in your apartment."

Now was the time to improvise.

"I didn't have even that much luck," I told her. "Yesterday morning I ran into a man—a man named Pemberton. An assistant professor, like myself; of—of mathematics. Higher mathematics, you know—very high. He was in dreadfully bad luck; they'd just been put out of their apartment and had no place to go. You know there's a housing shortage. He and his wife, and three or four children. So I told them they could take my apartment over

the week-end, while they looked for another place, and I went over to the—the Faculty Club.”

I could do no more, and there were broad and visible gaps in this narrative. But Agnes didn't thrust at them.

“I see,” she said. “It was very generous of you. But will they be out in time for the tea to-morrow?”

“Oh, the tea,” I temporized. “The tea. Why, you see——”

“I'm looking forward to that,” said Agnes. “I refused an invitation to take part in a round-table discussion of the child labor section of the conference to-morrow afternoon, because I had this engagement. I do hope you can get them out.”

What could I do? For behind my personal relations with this woman lay Wyndham College. If the college were to get any money out of Agnes, there must be a tea.

“I feel sure they'll be out,” I said gloomily. “Pemberton said he'd look for a place to-day. Oh, yes; they'll be out.”

“Miss Spivey and I have some business in town to-morrow,” said Agnes. “But the tea—perhaps I am not saying too much, Dr. Deupree, when I assure you that the tea is something I've been counting on. Haven't I, Miss Spivey?”

Of course, after this I could do nothing but ask Miss Spivey too. Perhaps I could keep Lucile away; and at any rate there would be safety in numbers. Still I was uneasy about the position of Miss Spivey. I must ask Wyman about this.

“Then after your labors of yesterday,” Agnes

pursued, "it must have been pleasant to motor up here this morning. I quite envied you when I saw you coming in."

Agnes was getting on—so far on that I began to wonder if somebody had been coaching her. She didn't appreciate her Pygmalion. Or perhaps she did, and this was only her little way of showing it.

"Yes, it was a pleasant trip," I admitted desperately. "I came up with a friend of my cousin, Mrs. Torrey—a little schoolgirl who's been visiting her."

"I didn't catch the name," said Agnes.

"Deming; Hazel Deming. She wanted to ask me if"—I groped for a subject on which Hazel could plausibly need my advice—"if she could enter Barnard College next year."

"Naturally she would seek your advice," said Agnes. "There were some things I wanted to ask you too. A young man from Oklahoma, who is much interested in the conscientious objectors, tells me that he would like a place on the Columbia faculty, so that he could be in the midst of the intellectual interests of New York. I assured him that your influence could certainly arrange it. He was very grateful to me. And there was a lady from Seattle who wants——"

"Ah, there is your little friend, Miss Deming. Curious that she should enjoy the company of the reporters; they have been very unsympathetic with the purposes of our conference. But I suppose the subjects discussed must be rather over her head, too."

"They're going in to lunch, Mrs. Clevenger," said the Spivey woman in an apologetic undertone.

"I hope Miss Spivey will excuse us," I said ardently. "I've been looking forward for the last two days to having you to myself at luncheon——"

"What a pity you didn't telephone and arrange it," said Agnes. "You see, I didn't know when you'd be back, so Miss Spivey and I are lunching with Mrs. Daingerfield of Arlington, the hostess of the conference."

She rose, with her face bearing just the shadow of a smile—a smile that blended tantalization and repulse. That was one thing my Galatea hadn't got from me. Yes, she was learning. She was suave, dignified, almost worldly. Something about her reached down into the depths of my memory and brought up an ancient unidentified recollection—smooth green lawns on a hillside; well-kept lawns, trimly cropped, on a hillside well graded, smoothly rounded. Where I'd seen those lawns I didn't know, nor why Agnes suggested them. Work for Dr. Freud here. A play of the winter had told us of smooth green hills as the Freudian symbol of a voluptuous form, but why should the thing work backward?

No, it was something else. Somewhere I had seen those well-groomed sloping lawns; there was some association that attached them to Agnes. But I couldn't remember. So I gave it up, realized that my disappointment had compensations, and set out to look for Hazel.

XXI.

The Golden Fleece, and Medea.

BUT it wasn't my lucky day. Hazel and Sarah were at a table on the terrace, with the reporters. She called to me over their heads—"Too bad you didn't come a little sooner, Alec. I don't believe there's room for another chair."

As she turned in obvious eager interest to the man beside her I laid hold on Hershfield. He sat pretty far down toward the other end of the table, but it was better than nothing.

"For the love of Heaven," I whispered, "let me have your seat."

"Why should I let you have my seat? I have to eat, don't I? Moreover, I'm an honest working man. The news of this conference, to-day, is what she thinks about it, unless somebody pries a million out of a prospect, or Gushmore falls into the swimming pool or something . . . Besides, Deupree—how many women do you want at one time?"

The prurient scoundrel was still misconstruing what he'd seen at the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. I laughed wildly.

"I'll give you some news," I promised. "Wait till to-night. Wait till I make my speech. Wait!"

Meanwhile I had to do the waiting. But I had

no appetite for lunch; I went down to the bar, and in its cool recesses I found Wyman.

“Well, Alec! Thank the gods above! You’ve come back to your duties just in time. I’ve done all I can for your friend Mrs. Clevenger. She wears a little, Alec; she wears a little.”

“What’s the matter with her?” I demanded. He mustn’t knock my Galatea, the work of my own hands. “She seems to be the most imposing person up here.”

“Imposing is the word. The first night, Alec, I was in raptures. But one must rest the eye from time to time. You can’t simply look at her; you have to talk to her. Worse, you have to listen to her. She’s somewhat dogmatic, Alec—somewhat all-inclusive—somewhat ex-cathedra, if you get me.”

“I’ve listened to her,” I admitted. “But the great question is, did you keep her amused?”

“Oh, I held my own. I held my own. Except for about half an hour. Things got so infernally dull yesterday afternoon that—you didn’t tell me very much about this woman, Alec—that I asked her to come out in the lounge and have a drink. Well! Your college all but lost its endowment fund in that moment. She told me she’d never had a drink in her life.”

“Why, three cheers for her,” I cried. “That’s true, but she doesn’t know it. She thought she was telling you the first lie of a spotless career.”

“Oh, very spotless. Lord! I didn’t know, you see; and—I’d been talking her over with Hershfield a little bit, and I asked him if he thought she looked

like one who would take a drink, and he said he did——”

“I’ll kill him,” I vowed. “Sink my fingers in his fat throat.”

“Oh, don’t blame him. After a couple of days at this conference, old Volstead himself would be ready for anything that would make things look brighter. However, she wasn’t. I had hard work to keep her from having me reported to the hotel management and shipped back to town as an undesirable. But for half an hour, I flatter myself, I was at my best. Eventually it was smoothed over.”

“But have you kept her away from Gushmore?”

“Oh, beautifully. I was with her when they first met; I stuck like a burr, for all his impolite suggestions that I should go chase myself; and I got her away in two minutes. He hasn’t talked to her since, unless they’ve done a Romeo and Juliet on the fire escape while I was asleep. All day yesterday I kept her amused—if you’ve ever tried to keep her amused on Sunday, you’ll appreciate that—and last night, when the strain was becoming too much, I found a woman to help me.”

“Miss Spivey?” I asked, a great load lifting from my soul.

“Emerine Spivey. She’s secretary of something—I don’t know what. But she’s also an ancient and irreconcilable enemy of Gushmore—a war that goes back to the Ford peace party. From all I can hear, she never had an invitation to this conference; she just turned up. Gushmore did his best to get her sent back to New York, but she got on the right side

of Mrs. Daingerfield, and even Gushmore can't move her now. So—when I heard that, I decided that if anybody was divinely anointed to look after Mrs. Clevenger it was Miss Spivey. Have I done well?"

"You have," I told him. "So well that I wish you'd go on doing well for one day more. I'm in a hell of a tangle for to-morrow. I'm giving a tea, at my apartment on Morningside. Somehow I've had to invite flocks of women, brigades of women, one after another. And not a man but me. There'll be a riot, unless I have help. And you of all men are the best at keeping things going, carrying the thread of a conversation and getting everybody tangled up in it, amusing the ladies——"

"It's a fact," he admitted, "that I do seem able to arouse their interest. Are they all—er—just feasts for the eye, like Mrs. Clevenger?"

"Not a bit. Two of them are very entertaining. That is, if you'll do a little entertaining to start——"

"Leave them to me, Alec. Leave them to me."

So that prospect was brighter; but in other respects it seemed to be my off day. I sought out Agnes before the afternoon session and asked if I might sit with her. She was willing enough; I even ventured to think that my insistence, determined if a trifle late, was having some effect. But just as we'd placed two comfortable chairs beside a broad window that opened from the assembly hall on the terrace, and had settled down to keep cool during the proceedings, Gushmore found us. I prepared to defend Agnes, but he wanted me.

"My dear Doctor Deupree, we've missed you very badly. I know you have many responsibilities and preoccupations in town, but we'd counted on your advice and assistance in addition to your address. Won't you come up on the platform with the committee?"

"I hardly feel that that is my place," I said. "Mrs. Clevenger and I——"

"I release you," Agnes put in cheerfully. "I should not dream of standing between you and an honor that is rightfully yours."

It was clear that she would release me by force if necessary, so I followed Gushmore to the platform and sat down on a sticky chair in a row of solemn persons in black frock coats. They were furtively running their handkerchiefs under their collars, most of them, and as the hall filled up, rows of palm-leaf fans began to wave in perfect time. Gushmore took the chair, and presently announced to the gathering that our interchange of ideas on the pressing problems of the time had already been of great value, despite the misleading accounts appearing in the press, and that it was our privilege to hear as the first number on the afternoon program a paper on the reduction of the percentage of illiteracy among the native-born population of our cities.

The paper came to a belated end, long after the reverend clergyman who sat beside me had leaned over in a worshipful attitude with his head bowed on his hands, and gone to sleep; but there were more papers. For three hours and more I endured it, while the conference heard about the reduction of

illiteracy, the problem of the unmarried mother, and the righteous demand of India to be freed from British rule. There was a praiseworthy listlessness about the audience; nobody seemed to thrill with righteous indignation; only Gushmore sat erect in the center of the front row, his hand thrust in the bosom of his frock coat, his eyes fixed on the ceiling with a look of thankfulness that he was permitted to hear such words of edification. And he had reason to be thankful; Wyman had told me that he had four or five satellites who did the leg work for him, and it seemed probable that among the groups of delegates who now and again repassed our windows, as they strolled up and down the terrace, there were those who were sowing the seed and planting thoughts that might germinate into legacies, subventions, and donations. As Hershfield had said, the oratory was merely the scenery; the action of the drama took place in little gatherings of two and three.

The quest of the Golden Fleece . . . There was a golden fleece on every tree, in that conference; but my eyes kept going down to the chairs by the window, where Agnes's golden head glowed beside the drabness of Miss Spivey. This was my own particular quest, and I'd have to take it more seriously. I thought a good deal about Agnes during that long afternoon—the more, perhaps, because Hazel was nowhere in sight.

Before the meeting was over, Agnes and Miss Spivey walked out; she seemed to have had enough of Gushmore's intellectual feast. When the session

ended I couldn't find her; somebody told me they'd gone for a stroll in the grounds. But I had no time to hunt her just then, for I was filled with high resolve.

It had to do with my speech. I'd never written that speech, but ever since the opening session on Friday night I'd had the germ of it in my mind. Not about colleges and the mentally unfit; but another speech; a speech that would start a fight that might blow up the conference; a speech that would be news. I hadn't written it down, but I was boiling with it, especially since this agonizing ordeal this afternoon. So, as a first preliminary, I went out to the desk and told them that I intended to pay my own hotel bill. What I had in mind wouldn't allow me to be under obligation to Gushmore.

With that attended to, I went hunting—hunting for my Golden Fleece, or for Hazel. Elated by the great decision to give the conference a shock, I was ready for either. I felt like an Oriental despot wandering about in his seraglio, confident that if he missed one he'd find another just as good. But I found nobody—nobody but Wyman.

“I don't suppose you've seen the girl who came up here with me this morning?”

“Did a girl come up here with you this morning? My God! With Mrs. Clevenger on your mind? Haven't you any sense at all?”

“No,” I conceded. “That is—— There are circumstances—— Oh, well, after making all allowances, the answer is still no. So you haven't seen her?”

“What does she look like? Who is she?”

“Her name’s Hazel Deming.”

“Oh!” His contempt turned to admiration.

“Yes, I saw her. But she’s gone back to town.”

“Why did she do that?” I asked with difficulty. For I knew. I’d deceived her about Agnes. She’d been pitying me for having an old lady on my hands. Now she’d think I’d been making a fool of her; and she wasn’t old enough to realize that for most of us being made a fool of, though superfluous, is not irreparable.

“I don’t know. Somebody—the Evening Post man—told me. I believe the news spread from the reporters to the committee in charge that twenty million dollars had arrived unexpectedly. It nearly broke up the session—in fact, I hear that’s why you got your seat on the platform. Two or three of the committee slipped out to lay an ambush and get her to invest in their private millenniums; but she got away.”

This took most of the edge off the conference. It even took the edge off my speech; for I realized that I’d been looking forward all day, childishly, to the effect of that speech on her. I wanted to show off. She thought but lightly of the men of our town, where she could knock out mashers and scare burglars into a leap through the window. She liked them rough. And I wanted to show her that I could be bold and harsh, that I could start a fight, that I wasn’t afraid of trouble and could handle myself in a tight place. But she was gone. Nobody would hear my speech; nobody except Agnes, and Gush-

more, and the conference, and the readers of tomorrow morning's newspapers, and a million people who were listening in on the radio. In effect, nobody.

Gloomily, I went up to my room and dressed for dinner—and Agnes.

When I came down there was no Agnes in sight; but she had been seen going up in the elevator. Therefore, she was dressing. As I paced nervously up and down the lobby I realized that she was taking her time about it. Conceivably, she was dressing up to an occasion. Ah, well, maybe it would turn out to be an occasion. Who knew? Who knew anything? Not I. At any rate, as more and more people appeared in the lobby and began to drift on toward the dining room I found myself missing even Agnes in a way. She would improve the decoration. All about me were men in the antique and moth-eaten evening dress of the penniless intellectual, women in high collars that hid hollow necks. My clothes were new; Agnes's throat was plump. We'd show 'em.

Pacing farther and more nervously, constantly glancing back to the elevator, looking for my Golden Fleece—and then I saw a sight that stopped me suddenly. In a corner of the veranda Sarah Whitlow sat stiffly in a rocking chair, listening to two earnest gentlemen. Hershfield passed just then, and I seized him.

“What does that mean?” I demanded. He flung a hurried look at them.

"Two of Gushmore's leg men. They keep the dragon busy while he plays for the girl."

"For the girl? You don't mean to tell me she's come back?"

"Oh, yes, she's back. Came back half an hour ago. No, I don't know where she is now. Why the devil should I? I've got my story."

"I had a dinner engagement with her," I said nervously. "But if Gushmore——"

"Alec, if you didn't have so many women on the string, maybe you'd have time to keep them out of trouble. If you expect the oil fields of California to save your college, instead of this woman from Indianapolis——"

"Now what the devil do you mean by that?"

He shrugged.

"Well, you know, you've got no particular reason to feel any moral superiority over the rest of this conference. You're trying to get money for your college. Yes, of course that's a worthy purpose. All these people have worthy purposes, to hear them talk. You and all the rest of them, all trying to pry a little money out of rich women. Why, Alec, you're only a bush-league grafter, and here you are trying to stick in fast company. You'll have to hump, boy; you'll have to hump."

"If you think I'm trying to get money from Hazel——"

"What could I think?" he apologized. "I saw you'd let the other one go——"

"But I haven't let her go. Wyman looked after

her while I was in town over the week end, and when he wore out he drafted a woman to relieve him."

"Yes—do you know the woman?"

"A Miss Spivey. Gushmore's deadly enemy."

Hershfield fanned himself sorrowfully with his straw hat.

"Good night, alma mater. My boy, if Gushmore is a leech that woman is a suction pump. If he is a snake she's a cobra. Emerine Spivey is secretary of the Home for Orphans of the Victims of the Tobacco Habit. She's the best legacy hunter alive. She excels in depriving widows and orphans of the residue of the estate. Merciless to the dead, she is equally unsparing of the living. She can smell gold farther away than a divining rod, and extract it more efficiently than the cyanide process. She's a thug, a yegg, a pirate; and she's invincible because she's honest—lowest overhead of any charity in town—all the money she gets really goes to this fool home of hers; she lives on about twenty-five a week and turns in the rest for the cause.

"Why did you ever let her—— A newspaperman could have given you that woman's record in a minute. But what does Wyman know? He evidently thought it was the field against Gushmore—protect your fleecy lamb from him and you're all right. But the woods are full of lone wolves. And here you—sitting in on a game that's miles beyond your depth—you deliberately go and waste Sunday in town hellin' around with wild women—oh, yes, Fan told me you put on a party up in your apart-

ment yesterday—and now Gushmore's got one of your prospects, and Emerine Spivey's got the other, and you get sore if anybody tries to tell you to lay off the sheik stuff when you're out for money."

He went away and left me. I didn't blame him. I wished I could go away and leave myself. But I couldn't leave myself. I couldn't leave Agnes, now, for it was evident that something would have to be done, done promptly and decisively, to save our college's endowment fund. I couldn't leave Hazel, for I had a dinner engagement with her. So I resumed my wild prowlings about the lobby, with eyes that searched here and there for Hazel's little hat, and wandered back to the elevator from which Agnes might emerge at any moment.

The elevator door rolled back, and a woman came out. A woman I'd never seen before, with curly brown bobbed hair and opaque green eyes and a lithe, steely figure. The figure was draped in a satin evening gown of a tint that might have been henna or apricot or golden brown, hung from her bare shoulders by narrow gold straps; beneath it appeared gilded slippers and gold stockings; suspended from an all but invisible chain a single blue diamond, big as a golf ball, blazed on her breast. Serene, unfathomable eyes held me as she came toward me with a nonchalant, insolent grace. This child who smote mashers, who drove road hogs off the road, who fell into subway pits—she was a woman, of infinite poise and maturity. If Agnes was the Golden Fleece, Hazel was Medea, the Contriving Woman, the Subtle One. She was—there

was no other term for it—she was a woman of the world.

Yet just for the fraction of a second I caught a glint of something else; something that I found strangely exciting, yet almost pathetic. For just that flicker of an eyelash she was only a kid, playing that she was a woman of the world . . . But she was all a woman of the world as she came up to me with a cool—

“Been waiting long? I thought I’d better go back to town and get some clothes, when I saw that the best people were doing it.”

I knew what best people she had in mind; and I thought I knew what was coming. We’d have to wait here; she’d want to show me off, to parade me before Agnes. But I was wrong. She handed me her silken cloak; and as I wrapped it around her, rather hesitantly, she reminded me:

“We’re going to take a little drive and dine up the river, aren’t we? Or do you have to stay?”

“I’m free for a couple of hours. But—” I looked at her splendor. “But you can’t drive a roadster now. You’d spoil your clothes.”

The green eyes flashed over me enigmatically.

“I have other clothes . . . We’d better hurry, while Sarah’s busy. I’ve left a message for her, so she won’t start them dragging the swimming pool. Come along—if you really want to go.”

XXII.

Abduction from the Seraglio.

AGNES went out of mind; everything went out of mind but this radiant imperious woman. I hardly noticed even the news photographers who picked up Hazel's trail, just as the car came out of the garage, and made us run a gauntlet of cameras in the evening sunshine.

"I seem to be always getting you into the papers," she apologized. "I don't know what Mrs. Torrey will think of me."

"Never mind. I'm going to get into to-morrow's papers in my own right."

"Your speech?"

"My speech."

"'Colleges and the Mentally Unfit,'" she mused. "I know that will be so interesting. I've always wondered what my mental age was, but I never dared ask. There was a boy in the psychology department last year—an instructor—who wanted to test me; but before he got around to it he got to be kind of wild about me, and was afraid of what he'd find out. I've been afraid even to dance with a psychologist since then; because nobody's decent under psychoanalysis and nobody has an ounce of brains under an intelligence test, so I'm always

wondering what they think of me. Isn't it lucky you're a professor of Latin?"

"You'll hear nothing about intelligence tests from me," I said darkly.

"Alec Deupree! Do you mean to say you haven't written that speech yet?"

"Not that one. I'll never write it. But I'm going to tell them."

"Tell them what?"

I began pouring out the ideas that had been spinning in my superheated brain ever since the first night of the conference. The theory of segregation was excellent, I admitted; but let the socially inefficient alone. They were the salt of the earth; there was Scriptural authority for that. Segregation, yes; I was for it. But segregate the uplifters, the reformers, the advisers, the interferers; all the chest-thumpers who advertised their own superior wisdom or superior holiness. Let the League of Nations buy Vesuvius from Italy, and segregate them well down in the crater—everybody who assumed to tell other people how they ought to live. A practical beginning might be made by segregating the entire personnel of this conference.

Since the public seemed determined to take every man at his own valuation, make it a capital crime to give oneself a valuation; add that it should be a felony to give advice unasked, and *prima facie* evidence of insanity to give it when it was asked for; try the great experiment of putting Christianity into practice, of making every man the custodian of his own soul, and of no other. A sweeping reform?

Certainly; but only by the segregation of the present ruling class could the world be made safe from jackassocracy . . .

I talked on while we spun over the roads, and the sun set, and the stars twinkled before moonrise like small-town girls having their fling before curfew. When I tired at last, and came out of my idea drunk to look at Hazel, she was stealing occasional apprehensive glances at me as one who didn't quite know whether her passenger ought to be taken on up the river, or straight across country to Matteawan.

"Don't you like it?" I asked.

"It sounds awfully deep. But don't try to tell me now what it's all about. Wait till I can stop driving. One thing at a time."

So I waited, and we ran on and on into the hazy blue-gray distance. Beyond the river piles of cloud were slowly rearing, to look down into the abyss where the sun had vanished; eastward the horizon was already milky with the light of the hidden moon. Rest . . . the first real rest since—since I'd last seen Hazel. I wished that it would never end; but when at last I gathered courage to look at my watch I realized that it must end before it had really begun.

"It's five minutes of eight," I cried in panic, "and we must be fifty miles from Maplecrest. The session begins at eight thirty, and I come on a little after nine. We'll not even have time for dinner; you'll have to turn around now."

Hazel stepped on something, and the needle of the speedometer swung half-way around the circle.

"Oh, no," she said calmly. "You need a rest. Your nerves are ragged."

I realized that it was time to be firm.

"Turn around," I commanded, "or I'll take the wheel away from you."

"Maybe you could pull my hands off," she admitted, "but I'm pretty strong. And while you were trying it the car would be doing a nose dive over the bluff. Must be two hundred feet to the bottom. Want to try it, or will you be good?"

"But my speech! I promised Gushmore——"

"Don't worry about Gushmore. I told that little fellow from the Herald to tell Gushmore that you'd been overcome by the heat, and that the hotel doctor had ordered you to bed. In other words, Alec, you're being very thoroughly kidnapped. I'm segregating one of the socially inefficient. Are you going to be nice about it?"

I gave in with a sigh of relief.

"Since you leave my conscience no way of escape," I said, "I might as well admit that I rather like it."

Apparently she liked it too; we drove on, till finally we saw a string of lights ahead of us overlooking the river.

"I suppose that's a roadhouse," said Hazel, "and I need food. How about you?"

"I didn't have lunch."

"Why, you poor creature! We'll stop here . . . But no. You'd slip out and steal the car and drive back to the—the old lady . . . You old devil, you!"

Relieved by the discovery that she didn't take the

deception to heart, I assured her that not even the lure of Mrs. Clevenger could draw me away from food just now. So we stopped, were led through an almost empty dining room to a wholly empty outdoor restaurant, and got a table on the edge of the bluff. On the right a wooded slope plunged down to the smooth pewter-hued expanse of the Hudson, on the left rolling hills were whitened by the rising moon. When the waiter had taken our order and left, we were effectually as isolated as on a peak in the Alps.

Hazel studied me with an expression I couldn't quite understand.

"If I'd never met you till to-day," she said presently, "I think I'd be rather afraid of you."

It seemed to me that she ought to be afraid of me anyway. I was twenty-nine and she was nineteen; I was going to be a full professor next year, and next year she would have been a sophomore if she'd stayed in college; I was universally regarded as a learned and trustworthy young man, with a brilliant future and no past at all—at least till this last week; but she'd been treating me as a sympathetic but helpless person of her own age; one who could be kidnapped with impunity, and without compunction.

"What did I do to scare you?"

"Oh, you didn't scare me, exactly. But that speech——"

"What was the matter with it? And why wouldn't you let me deliver it? I thought that was a good speech. It needs to be said."

"It needs to be said," Hazel agreed, "but not by you. Let somebody who's running for president say it first."

"But that's just the trouble. People who run for president wouldn't say it, and people who would say it would never get a chance to run for president. So it's up to private citizens."

"But you're not a private enough citizen. If you'd made that speech you'd have started a fight——"

"Which I'd have liked."

"Of course you'd have liked it. But would your university have liked it? You know how some of the papers would have played it up. 'Columbia Professor Flays Intellect, Urges Bonehead Rule.' Oh, yes; I read the headlines. You're going to be promoted next year, if you're good. If you get into a scrape they might decide to give somebody else the benefit of the doubt. Now do you see why I kidnapped you?"

There was reason in this; more, there was a solicitude that excited me astonishingly. There was also, however, a certain impertinence in her calmly pulling me out of a hole without asking me about it.

"But you'd made up your mind to kidnap me before you left," I reminded her, "when you sent that message to Gushmore."

"I'd thought of it," she admitted, "so I sent that message as a precaution. No, I didn't know what you were going to say, but I could see that you were worried about something. You looked as if you needed a rest. Oh, I know you think I've got too

much nerve, and maybe I have. But you let yourself in for this thing when you accepted the invitation, and I was just getting you out by the nearest exit—like pretending you have a headache when you don't want to dance with somebody. Now, honestly, Alec—aren't you glad?"

Of course I was glad; gladder still a moment later, when a steak with accessories was placed before us. We dined sumptuously and appreciatively; and when dinner was over a waiter who knew his trade took away the table lamp and left us with no light but the full moon sailing over the misty hills. I lit a cigar and Hazel decided to make one of her infrequent experiments with a cigarette—she knew she ought to like them, but didn't believe she ever would.

"Being kidnapped is good for you," she observed. "You look all cheered up."

Naturally I looked all cheered up. I was looking at her; at the moonlight that fell on her white shoulders and drew queer prismatic glints from the pendant diamond; at the green eyes sparkling in reflected light. She didn't look like Medea now; she didn't look particularly like a woman of the world. She looked like Hazel. Youth—strength—grace.

"I hope you'll do it often," I said. "Though it's really true that I have to work hard this summer."

"Mrs. Clevenger," she whispered, a smile flashing across her face.

"No," I said firmly. I had not only forgotten Mrs. Clevenger—that had happened before—but I had determined to go on forgetting Mrs. Clevenger.

"My book. I really do have to finish it by September. But I'd work a good deal better with a day off now and then. And if you're going to stay in town anyway, I do want to show you around. I haven't really started yet."

Around the bend in the river came the night boat, an oblong of golden brilliance, shooting the white beam of its searchlight this way and that on the mist-hung mountains. It swept over us, bright and unbearable as the judgment day, then left us again in the moonlight that by contrast seemed almost darkness.

"I'll probably know a good deal about this town before the summer's over," said Hazel. "You aren't the only volunteer guide who's offered his services. I had a wireless this morning from Kenneth France—a regular volume. His boat is due the first of the week, and he's promised to show me——"

"Who's Kenneth France?" I interrupted.

"Why, I thought everybody knew Kenneth France!"

She was, I realized at last, a woman of the world I had seen only in brief furtive peeps through the window, the world I could never know. She had seen more than I; she could see still more, could go to places beyond my reach. She knew people I'd never meet, unless they asked me to their homes to deliver a learned address after dinner—to give an exhibition, and be rewarded with food for doing my stuff. For she was beautiful and entertaining; also, she had twenty million dollars . . .

"Why, Kenneth France," she explained in the tone of one teaching American history to a child in the third grade, "Kenneth France used to be the Harvard fullback; and then he was an ace in the flying corps. And then he came back to California after the war, and started playing polo and fooling around with two or three big ranches he owns. He's just been over to London to see about a thing some English friends of his wanted him to go into—some syndicate to rent all of Russia and show the Bolsheviks how to run it, or something like that. But he wrote me that it didn't look good, and would be too much work anyway; so he's coming back.

"He knows everybody in New York; the sort Mrs. Torrey knows, and the sort she'd like to know, and all the actors and artists besides. And he says he's going to take Fifth Avenue and Broadway and Greenwich Village all apart to show me what makes them go."

"And then," I said sulkily, "you'll think you've seen New York. You, the disciple of O. Henry."

"Well?" she challenged. "Kenneth can show me what everybody hears about. That's something. What else can you show me?"

"Kenneth France," I said, "will show you people who've arrived. It doesn't make so much difference what they've arrived at; the point is that they've got there, and all they have to do now is to stay there, and show off. I'll show you people who are still arriving. They may never arrive, but they keep on trying. People who come from the ends of

the earth looking for something that most of them never get, and yet they stay. They like it.

"It's a large town, Hazel. Maybe old gentlemen who sit around in their clubs on the Avenue, with nothing to look forward to but being each other's pallbearers, are getting the best of it. And maybe not. They're on top of the town. They've got there. They're through.

"But how about the ones that are on their way up, or think they're on the way up? I'll show you people who are desperately poor and quite possibly desperately dirty, living in conditions you and I couldn't endure for a day; but living, reading, thinking, helping each other with their last cent, and always, through the dirt and drudgery, climbing. Men and women who came to America to use the gifts they couldn't use where they were born; and who now that they're here turn their backs on the things they want to do, the things they could do, because they're needed, first of all, to help their own people that didn't have so good a start.

"Even where Kenneth France takes you you'll see the new rich. Unluckily we have no segregated district for them. I'll show you something a little more cheerful—the new bourgeois; people just climbing over the ragged edge, and beginning to realize that they can live in some comfort."

"And the new poor?" she interrupted.

"Yes, the new poor, too. A dozen little neighborhoods cut off by the sweep of business, or the decay of the streets around them into slums, where a few

old people are still hanging on in their old houses, with their old furniture, trying to keep up the old traditions. No, they don't succeed in doing it forever; they die, and their houses are swept away. But while they're living it out their presence gives a tone to a neighborhood that makes it a better place for young people just getting started. The new poor . . . The threshold of poverty is a little higher in this town; plenty of us find we're poor on what would be prosperity back home. But what's the difference? Unless you're poor you never hear of half the things this town can give you, and does give you, free.

"Why, you can't stand still here; you can't vegetate; you're always going up or going down. Hard, yes; it drives you; you're always on the edge of the bottomless pit. What of it? That's the way you learn to balance. Is learning to balance the end of life? I don't know. But keeping out of the bottomless pit is all most of us can hope for, and getting a little fun while we teeter on the brink. Not you—you're rich. But come and watch the rest of us teeter. We like it.

"I'll show you young people living on the edge of destitution, living in bare little flats, not sure but that the foot of the rainbow is just as far away as ever; wasting the livest blood in the country because they can't afford to have children; with little chance to make real friends, or to keep them in this town where everybody's always moving; married couples driven back to each other, to an isolation, an enforced intimacy you won't find anywhere else;

forced to know each other, good and bad, inside and out, and to make adjustments day after day, if they're going to stick it at all; working hard, playing a little, dreaming a little, clinging to each other's hands, and liking it. Why do they like it? I don't know. Probably they haven't got what they came for; possibly they'll never get it; they've given up everything else they might have had, and they don't know if they'll ever get anything at all. But you couldn't chase them away; they like it.

"That's my town . . ."

I paused, limp, exhausted, rather ashamed of my emotion.

"My town too," said Hazel softly. "The town I came to see. And I was beginning to be afraid that nobody would show it to me. Mrs. Torrey wouldn't—nor Sarah."

Why should she remind me—or herself—of those two strong-minded women?

"Everything you do," I said pettishly, "seems to be overshadowed by Sarah. You hire the woman, don't you? Why don't you get rid of her?"

"Oh—I have to have somebody with me. Sarah's an old friend of the family—she was good to us when we were poor. And she's good to me now, of course, as well as she knows how—good for me, too, I guess. You see, I'm an orphan, and there's nobody to tell me I can't do whatever I like, and I have more money than I need; I'd find everything pretty easy if it weren't for Sarah. Maybe too easy. Getting around her keeps my wits sharpened. Besides, she's funny."

"All right," I conceded. "If the game is getting around Sarah, she's going to be got around quite a lot this summer. For I want—I want to show you—Hazel——"

"Of course," she agreed amiably, "I'd like to see lots of things you can show me. But I won't have as much time as you think. Kenneth is going to take me——"

"Where does he come in?" I growled.

The opaque green eyes stared at me inscrutably.

"Why, I'm engaged to him."

Cat! Cat! Lithe sinuous body and impenetrable eyes, velvet paws that could be so softly caressing, that could play with the ridiculous mouse, stroking him till he felt that he must be a gallant and formidable creature—till he strutted and posed, and proclaimed the splendor of his mouse hole, its charms unequalled among mouse holes since time began—and then the lazy cat wearied of her play, and struck the claws deep in, and through and through him . . .

My fingers tightened round the edge of the table as I glared at her—jaunty, defiant, provocative, her head thrown back, her bare throat white in the moonlight; the throat my fingers hungered for. I had no prevision that I was capable of this cold fury that had struck me silent and motionless; that kept me deadly still because I wanted to kill her. Engaged to Kenneth France . . . I was afraid of what I might do if I stirred, but she wasn't afraid. She wouldn't be afraid of certain death. She would only laugh, as she was ready to laugh at me if I

reached out to grasp her; as she would laugh while her face was turning black under the moon . . . Cat . . .

The cold fury passed, slowly, as I sat with fingers gripping the table; passed and left only a dull chill resentment like the steady cold rain that follows the cloudburst. Such anger as I had remaining was anger at myself. Why had I puffed myself up out of character, assumed to play the hero when I was cast for the comic relief? Did I know myself no better than that? Couldn't I have known that Hazel, who saw through everything with deadly directness, would see through me at first glance? Nobody ever thought of me in that way . . .

"Oh, the devil!" I groaned, startled by my own voice after a silence that seemed to have begun back in the Stone Age.

"He isn't a devil at all," said Hazel cheerfully. "He's really very nice. I want you to meet him, of course; I know he'd like you—I mean, I know you'd like him—I—oh, you know what I mean."

I didn't know what she meant, and didn't care; I didn't even care enough to pay attention to the fact that for the first time since I'd met her she didn't seem to know what she meant. I was trying to remind myself that this thing had happened to other people before; that it had even happened to me before . . . No, it hadn't. Not this.

Lightly humming something from a musical comedy that I hadn't seen—and would never see now, for I couldn't see it without remembering—she looked at her wrist watch.

“We’d better be starting back; it will be past midnight when we get to Maplecrest. Won’t Sarah be mad! I suppose she and I ought to stay over night, it’s so late; but just because she’ll be so mad, I think I’ll drive back in town and let her cool off. It’s a good night for cooling off.”

XXIII.

The Goddess of Liberty.

A GOOD night for cooling off. In our long silent drive back to the inn I grew positively frigid. The thing that chilled me through was not so much what had happened—that was bad enough—but what might have happened. I might have killed her—ended her. Who was I to determine the destiny of this gay, graceful creature whose way had happened to cross mine for a moment? She was out of my class; I ought to be thankful for what little time I had had with her. She would go her way, and I would go mine.

But what was my way? I spent the last half-hour of the ride thinking of that without coming to any conclusion except that the ass, when he tried to wear the lion's skin, was still an ass. Yet even the ass, that humble beast of burden, has his place in the world; doubtless even his asinine triumphs, and a certain low grade of content. As Wyman had said, one must go on living.

When we drove up under the pillared entrance the inn was almost dark. Sarah was sitting on the steps; she had been sitting there, we inferred, for at least five hours, and she proceeded to uncork some remarks of a vitriolic nature that would have

flattered me to the skies if I hadn't been so recently reminded that they couldn't be true.

"Mrs. Whitlow, you don't know what you're saying——"

Hazel caught my shoulders and pushed me back.

"Go away and let us fight it out alone. This isn't your war. I'll see you to-morrow."

"Where will you see me to-morrow?" I asked.

"Aren't you going back to town?"

"Of course. I'm coming to your tea. Now don't tell me you've revoked the invitation. I want to meet Mrs. Clevenger."

Subtle, serpentine woman! How did she know I'd been thinking about Mrs. Clevenger? How did she know anything—and yet she seemed to know everything. She knew with sure instinct how to let me down easily after that brutal blow across the dinner table, how to point out to me, gently, the way that Nature had indicated, that I was evidently destined to take. Mrs. Clevenger . . . To-night would have been the golden opportunity, and I'd wasted it with Kenneth France's fiancée—wasted it almost certainly, for by this time Agnes would be in bed. More need for apology. But this time I'd really apologize, whole-heartedly. I'd been led astray into side issues; I'd gone crazy. But now I'd learned my lesson.

A little late, perhaps; certainly the Reverend Doctor A. Judson Goodhue would have said it was a little late. But even the terrible Miss Spivey couldn't take all, or much of Agnes's money; there would be enough left for a women's dormitory, a

memorial gateway, and half a million on the endowment fund. Whose fault was it but mine, if Agnes had to fritter away her time with Spiveys? I ought to have stuck to her, taken care of her, kept her amused. I'd started out to take care of her, and left her flat. Most dubious of all, I'd aroused her interest—for she'd certainly been interested in me when we started on that drive in the Park—roused her interest and then run away.

I wouldn't run away now . . .

Then, as I sauntered through the lobby, I saw her.

In a big easy chair behind a pillar she was knitting and waiting. Waiting, at one o'clock in the morning; and dressed for an occasion, in a rather startling evening gown, with a cobwebby scarf thrown over her white shoulders.

. . . Tell me, where is fancy bred—in the heart or in the head? It is engendered in the eyes, with gazing fed. As I gazed, I found myself soothed by the gentle warmth of reviving fancy for Agnes. She was a beauty; built like the Goddess of Liberty, with hair like the Golden Fleece. And for four whole days I'd dodged an intimate talk with this magnificent creature. I'd thought of her only as somebody who might give money to Wyndham College, instead of a beautiful woman whose soul I personally, unaided, had discovered. I'd broken through the thorny barrier and awakened Princess Charming; I couldn't leave her there to wonder why I hadn't let her sleep.

She would be the perfect professor's wife—beautiful, wealthy, sedate; conscientiously interested in

my interests, calm enough not to demand what I couldn't give her. For I could give her affection, understanding; I liked her already and would like her better. Not what I wanted; but a little while after the dazzling brilliance of the searchlight had passed, the placid moonlight would be light enough. My friends knew it; Hazel had pushed me toward her. It wouldn't be necessary to profess more than I felt; it was all she would ask. We were sensible people, we had no illusions; we'd be an excellent match——

She looked up, startled, and the blue eyes met mine.

“Where have you been?”

The silver cord was loosed, and the golden bowl was broken. Where I had been was none of her business, yet. She'd expected a crisis this evening; she'd dressed up for it. When I vanished at dinner-time, she had waited for me. And what did she do when the crisis came at last? She asked me where I had been. That question, at that moment, was the mark of a born, incurable where-have-you-beener. Agnes was not for me.

But there was still Wyndham College. I'd failed in everything else; I mustn't fail in that.

“Never mind that,” I said firmly. “The point is not where I have been, but where I have come back to.”

“All this is about five hours late,” said Agnes. “The point is not only where you have been, but how long you have been there.”

As I looked at her serene plump smoothness, that

symbolic recollection came back into mind again—smooth green sloping lawns. But now I knew where I'd seen them. It was at Sandy Hook; those suave acclivities concealed a battery of twelve-inch guns.

"Well, you see," I explained, "my cousin, Mrs. Torrey, asked me to look after a friend of hers—Miss Deming. To keep her out of mischief."

"Ah! This sounds more like the truth. I was told that you had been overcome by the heat. Miss Spivey and I were much agitated. We inquired of the house physician. He had not been called in. We asked the manager of the hotel to send a bell-boy to your room. The bellboy climbed over the transom. You were not there. And to-night of all nights you were——"

"I was afraid she was going to get into trouble——"

"So that was why you went away with her. Oh, you were seen, Dr. Deupree. You were seen."

It was sporting of her to tell me that.

"Mrs. Clevenger, I suppose most men would try to lie out of this. But I must tell you the truth. This girl is young and headstrong. Stubborn. Mrs. Torrey charged me particularly to see that she didn't do anything foolish. And to-night I learned, by chance that she was planning to slip away up the river—slip away from her chaperon——"

"Her chaperon was much disturbed about it," said Agnes. "I heard her. She said some very unkind things about you, when she called up the state police."

"I don't care what she said about me," I asserted.

"I'd promised Mrs. Torrey to take care of this girl. And I learned that she was planning to slip away and have dinner with a young fellow who—who's been paying her some attention. There seemed to be some danger that he might—might gain an ascendancy over her. So I insisted on driving out with her to discuss this matter which involved her whole future."

"And did you break up this low intrigue?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, yes. I—I talked her out of it. She's gone back to New York now, in her chaperon's care. And there, Mrs. Clevenger, you have the truth. I admit that it is not a well constructed, convincing story. Other men might entertain you with some elaborate falsehood, but I can't. I'm a Deupree."

It was literally true, but grandfather Athanasius Deupree must have turned over in his grave and thumped three times on the lid of his coffin. However, he'd got me into this; he founded Wyndham College.

Agnes thought it over wearily; she looked almost pathetic.

"Oh, I don't know what to believe," she sighed. "You New Yorkers are so plausible."

There was yet hope, if she thought that story was plausible.

"We're not such a bad lot as you think," I said. "If you'd let me show you the parts of the town that I live in, and work in, and like——"

"Oh, but of course. Miss Spivey and I are going in early to-morrow morning—it's this morning,

isn't it? I'm not used to such late hours. And your tea——"

"You'll be there, won't you? I've invited a number of people to meet you. Interesting people."

"Yes," she admitted, "I'll be there."

"And," I promised, "I'll try to show you—er—fruits meet for repentance. This Deming affair is all straightened out now. I won't run away from you again."

"I hope not," she said demurely.

A bellboy was coming through the lobby, turning out the lights one by one. From afar he looked at us, evidently convinced that we could do without the lamp, that he'd never have to stay up on our account. Agnes saw him too. In a moment we'd be in the dark, except for such faint illumination as was offered by the moonlight falling through the distant windows. We'd be in the dark—and Agnes hadn't risen, she wasn't going away.

This was going to be another psychological moment. Life seemed to be just one psychological moment after another. Well, why not get it over with? It would probably happen, sooner or later. People expected it; Hazel expected it; Agnes expected it. True, the enthusiasm that I'd somewhat laboriously pumped up when I came in had gone, blown away by that first inapposite question. What of it? Would I be the only husband whose wife asked him where he had been, or who didn't dare to be anywhere? Why did I deserve anything better than the common lot? I'd turned to Agnes as a consolation; I'd stay with her as a penance.

"Agnes—" I began as the bellboy reached for the light.

And then, from some shadowed recess behind the pillar, something drifted toward us—a wisp of fog; a gray ghost. Emerine Spivey, with a load of documents under one arm, passed the other hand over her forehead and sighed:

"Oh, good evening, Mrs. Clevenger. Why, it's half-past one. You're up late."

"So are you," said Agnes morosely.

"Oh, I've been preparing the program for the meeting of the educational section. It's terribly wearing. But one feels one's responsibility——"

"One does indeed," said Agnes, as the bellboy with a black glance passed us by. "I hadn't realized it was so late. I'm afraid this is all your fault, Dr. Deupree."

"Quite true, Mrs. Clevenger."

"Your tea won't be much of a success, will it," suggested Miss Spivey, "if we don't all get some sleep."

That struck in. Agnes, unused to late hours—Agnes who had to get up early in the morning—Agnes who was going to meet interesting New Yorkers to-morrow afternoon, and must look her best—Agnes turned to me with a sigh and said:

"I'm afraid I must tell you good night now, doctor. Until to-morrow."

She went upstairs with the Spivey woman trailing beside her. A deadly woman. She had been preparing no program for the educational section; she had no standing at the conference. She'd been

keeping watch over Agnes, for the last five hours. It would take work to keep Agnes out of her clutches. There was no pleasure ahead of me—no breathtaking glorious prospect such as I'd seen for a few crazy minutes this evening; no hope of equable placid happiness such as I'd raised when I came back to Agnes. No fun anywhere. But my duty was still with me.

I was a Deupree.

XXIV.

Luckless Lucile.

SOMEWHAT to my own disgust, I did manage to sleep well that night, so well that I didn't get off to town till the noon train. That was a piece of luck, for Wyman was on the train, going back to town to write his story; and he had evidently had afterthoughts about my tea. But I put him on oath to come, and even to come at half-past four, half an hour ahead of the others, so as to be ready to start entertaining as soon as there was anybody to entertain. He could lubricate any emergency that might begin to creak, and this was no day to let anything start creaking.

As soon as I left the train, I telephoned to the neighborhood pastry shop and ordered the things for tea sent in. I'd have phoned to the corner florist, too; but I didn't know what kind of flowers Agnes and Hazel liked, and I knew if I ordered Lucile's preference she'd say something about them, and upset the carefully arranged equilibrium of the occasion . . . I'd have to do something for Lucile this week; give her some introductions; hunt her a cheaper hotel than any in which she might have established herself by this time. I'd been neglecting Lucile. But to-day she could be only one of three. I'd have to avoid letting Hazel see any con-

straint between me and Agnes, or Agnes between me and Hazel. This was going to be a merry party.

The prospect kept me down town as long as I could decently find excuses, and it was past three when I started for the apartment-house.

Thankful that I didn't have to sneak upstairs this time, I told Walter and Sadie that I was looking for some callers later on, and ascended in the elevator to set my house in order. I thought I noticed a smell of cigarette smoke as the key turned in the lock, but I wasn't prepared for what was waiting for me.

Lucile was curled up on the couch, in her yellow negligée.

"I'd like to get up," she said, "but I can't. Oh, Alec, I'm so glad to see you! It's been terribly lonesome."

"What's the matter?"

She thrust forward a slipperless foot, and I saw underneath the thin, distended stocking a huge white mass of bandages.

"Tripped over a rug yesterday morning and sprained my ankle. Isn't it horrid? I had to have a doctor come in and bandage it, and he said I might be able to hobble around by to-morrow. But now I can hardly touch it to the ground, even if I put all my weight on the other foot; and the only way I can get around is to put one knee on a chair and—and—— Oh, it's such a bother!"

"It undoubtedly is," I agreed. "You can't use it at all?"

"I can't walk. I've just barely been able to get

around the apartment; I've been on my back most of the time. I couldn't very well go to a hotel, could I?"

"I suppose not," I admitted. "But what are we going to do about my party?"

"Oh, I've attended to all that," she said calmly. "I hopped in with my knee on a chair and got the things off the dumbwaiter—— See!"

I saw. Over my typewriter-desk was spread my best table-cloth; and my silver tea set, the best cups, plates of sandwiches, little cakes and a box of Lucile's scented cigarettes were all ready for the party. The books that had overflowed from the shelves on to the floor were stacked like cordwood in the recess beside the kitchenette and half hidden under a wide-spread steamer rug. Every vase and extra pitcher was filled with bright-red carnations, her sorority flower, which I suppose she'd ordered herself. Carelessly flung about on the table were two or three highly personal garments which she seemed to have been mending—garments of a strident and excessive pinkness. And above all there was discernible, even through the scent of the flowers, a subtle fragrance that meant feminine occupancy, and that couldn't possibly be aired out before five o'clock. My apartment had felt the home-maker's touch.

"Didn't I do pretty well for a lady with only one foot?" she demanded proudly. "Everything's ready for the party except my mending. I was a little slow with that, for I hadn't done anything for myself in the last six years; but I'll get it out of

the way right now, and dress. Then let them come."

"Let them come?" I groaned. "With you here? How are we going to explain that?"

"Why, I supposed of course you could think up some way to make it look all right. You're always so clever."

"At this moment I feel anything but clever. Good Lord, Lucile! This party is designed to amuse Mrs. Clevenger so that she'll give that money to the college. You remember how strict she was—if she should see anything suspicious!"

"I don't see why you should insinuate that I look suspicious. Can't you say that you'd sublet your apartment to me, and that I was moving in next week and wanted to look it over beforehand?"

"People who sublet apartments don't come to look at them with sprained ankles that they can't walk on."

"Or that I was your sister, or something?"

"She knows that I haven't any sister, or anything."

"Or that I was the first one of the party that got here—that I mistook the hour, or something, and came early in my limousine——"

"How did you get up here with that ankle? No, I don't believe we could get away with that. If you were sour-faced and forty-five, almost any kind of story would get over, but as pretty as you are——"

"Who's coming? Anybody that knows me?"

"Not unless Mrs. Clevenger would remember you

from your college days, and there isn't one chance in ten thousand of that. Mrs. Clevenger, and a woman friend of hers; an author from Greenwich Village; Hazel Deming, and perhaps her chap-eron——”

“Who's Hazel Deming?” she demanded suspiciously. “Tell me something about her.”

“In Heaven's name, Lucile! I haven't time to tell you about Hazel, or anybody else. Don't you understand? These people are coming here in an hour and a half. Look at this place! All those—those pink things will have to be picked up and packed up; everything of yours will have to be shoved into your suitcases and slipped out of sight. And even then, does this look like a bachelor apartment? It does not. It looks like a place where a woman lives. I might get away with that, but if my guests find a girl here with a hopelessly sprained ankle—— Well!”

“It would be awful if gossip got out about us, wouldn't it?” she gasped. “Who is the man? Would he think——”

“Heavens, no. He wouldn't think anything; he knows I'm harmless. The person who would think is Agnes Clevenger. I've got to make a good impression on her. I'll have to get you out of the way somehow.”

“Get me out of the way? Why, Alec Deupree! If—if that's the way you feel about me, why did you ever invite me to your apartment at all?”

“Because I never supposed you'd sprain your ankle.”

"I suppose you'd like to send me to a—a rescue home, or something——"

"If you aren't well enough to go to a hotel in a taxicab," I said rather ungraciously, "we can call an ambulance and have you taken to a hospital."

The tears that had been hanging on her eyelashes let go at this, and began to roll down her cheeks.

"Before you came," she sobbed, "I was thinking how lovely you were to me—a perfect Bayard—and—and now you——"

Then the floods came. She'd held in her tears all day yesterday when there was no one to appreciate them; and now she could hold them in no longer. My shoulder had to go to work once more, pillowing that curly head. And as I petted her slowly back to quiet I felt rather ashamed of my bluntness. Only night before last we'd picked up our old friendship and found it almost as good as new after seven years, and already we were quarreling like a married couple. And it was my fault; I knew Lucile well enough to know she was never of much use in a crisis, and I ought to have made allowances for the brutality of her husband, the nervous strain of running away from him, and the pain of her ankle. To her, tired and hurt and discouraged, it might easily look as if her last friend were casting her out on the street because she was in the way.

So I consoled her, and while I was consoling her I thought of a way out.

"My dear child," I told her, "there is nothing in the world I'd like better than to have you at this party. The other people are, most of them, people

you'd like to know, now that you've come here to live; and you'd help it out, anyway. You look well around the house. But we can't afford it. You can't afford it for the sake of your reputation; and I can't afford it because Wyndham College needs the money. Remember how we used to pull together for the old place, Lucile? Well, if you've any college spirit left, now is the time to show it.

"I'm going to send you out for an automobile ride. You pack up your things and get them out of sight—and put some extraneous clothes on; and I'll get you a nice big car that you can ride around in till, say, about half-past six. Then you come back; we'll go to dinner somewhere and talk things over; and you can go to a hotel if your ankle is well enough, and to a hospital if it isn't."

"I hate to miss the party," she sighed. "But—Oh, well! All right."

It was easier to promise than to do, for I had to carry her into the bedroom, and to carry her mending in to her afterward. But she was game, and though it must have been a painful task to pack her clothes and dress, she was ready almost as soon as I'd finished telephoning to the garage. Lucile had always had her occasional moments of energy, if you could only get her started.

"You'll have to carry me downstairs," she reminded me. "I can't step on my foot yet. Lucky I had these pumps; they're as big as scows. And I hope you'll have a nice party."

"And the car is here," I observed, looking out of the window. "Let's get started."

I picked her up and carried her out into the hallway. She wrapped one arm around my neck and pushed the elevator bell with the other hand, and presently we heard it droning on its upward course.

"Talk about scandal!" she laughed. "Your hall-boys don't know anything about my ankle. What will they think when they see me in your arms?"

"They never think," I assured her out of the fullness of experience. "And as for their suspicions——"

I got no further. For the car rose up in front of us, the door swung back—and here were Agnes and Emerine Spivey.

I jumped frantically to get in the first word, but it was a rather uninspired word.

"I told you five," I said weakly. "You're early."

"So I see," said Miss Spivey gleefully. "Maybe we'd better come back at five, Mrs. Clevenger."

"Oh, no, no!" I urged. "Don't—don't go away, now that you're here. Just walk in. As soon as I take this—this sick lady down to her car——"

"It happens to be my car," said Agnes. "I bought it from Mr. Bonner this morning. I think we'd better resume our drive, Miss Spivey."

"But you'll come back for the party?" I begged wildly.

"You seem to be having a number of parties," Agnes commented. "No doubt we could drop in almost any time and find some kind of party. Down!"

And they went down, leaving Lucile and me cling-

ing helplessly to each other like shipwrecked castaways.

"Well!" she sighed at last. "Caught again! We do have the darndest luck. What are we going to do now?"

"We're going to go back into my apartment and shut the door, before anybody else sees us," I said; and we did.

"Do you suppose she'll come back?" Lucile asked.

"Not if the Spivey woman can prevent it," I predicted. "But maybe—— I have at times been able to put Agnes in a good humor; and she owes me something, if she'll only stop to think about it. Don't worry, Lucile. Give me a chance to talk to her, and maybe I can get this straightened out."

"Oh, I hope you can! Anyway, now that she's seen us at—at our worst, we might as well brazen it out. I'll show that woman, if she ever comes back. I'm going to help you, Alec. I've done you enough harm. You see, this woman has caught us in a compromising position. What she's going to think she's thought already; the damage has been done. If she comes back, she'll find me pouring tea. Tell the hall-boy to send our car back to the garage, if the miserable old thing ever gets here."

"But what are you going to say to Agnes?"

"Well, somebody will have to say something to her; and I can lie better than you can. I always could. When your friend Agnes comes back here, she'll run into the most convincing bundle of falsehoods she ever heard. We'll get that dormitory yet."

There was reason in this. Agnes had seen too much or not enough; it would certainly look more respectable to pretend that it was all a hasty misunderstanding than to try to smuggle Lucile out of the way. So I called off the automobile order, and Lucile and I were engaged in an ostentatiously innocuous game of double Canfield when the door-bell rang at a quarter to five.

But it wasn't Agnes. It was Wyman, clad in all the clothes he thought would impress Mrs. Clevenger.

"Well, Alec, is everybody here?"

"Only one ahead of you. Mrs. Pemberton——"

I got no further. Lucile had risen up on one foot, and she and Wyman were staring at each other, incredulous——

"You!" they cried in unison. She took a step forward, forgetting the ankle, and collapsed in a heap with a little scream. Wyman woke out of his stupor, picked her up and helped her to the couch.

"How the devil did you get here?" he demanded.

Well, of course I'd thought of the possibility, when Wyman and Lucile had told me their stories of ill-starred love, that it might have been the same affair from different angles; my imagination liked to work that way. But precisely because it was so obvious, because I was so good at imagining things for my friends, conjecturing buried past connections and possible future meetings, and a host of absurd complications that would bring together people I liked and throw a dash of romance into their prosaic lives, I'd dismissed it as a ridiculous fancy. But it

was true; and he'd found her in my rooms; and he hadn't kissed her; he was asking her what she was doing here——

"For God's sake," I implored him, "reserve your judgment till I tell you about it. I know Lucile's presence here looks suspicious, but we can explain everything——"

"Oh, you don't have to explain anything. I have every confidence in you, Alec—and in Lucile, of course. What I want to know is why she's in New York."

"I have left my husband."

"Yes, I supposed you'd done that. But, my dear girl, what is the idea?"

"I must live my own life," said Lucile. "I can not feel that it is right for me to go on living with a man who is repugnant to my higher self. Aren't you glad, Don?"

"Why, of course I'm glad," he declared; and at last they kissed. Their greeting wasn't as passionate as I'd have expected; but of course I was there—an intruder, an outsider. No doubt they were exercising restraint over their tempestuous natures.

"But what are you going to do?" he asked as they drew apart.

"I am determined to become economically independent."

"Oh, I see. Yes. Quite right. Excellent. Here in New York?"

"Here in New York. You and Alec will stand by me, won't you?"

"Of course we'll stand by you. Won't we, Alec?"

"Of course we'll stand by her," I declared loyally. Though I didn't see quite what my part was to be in the rest of the drama. By accident, I'd done the thing I had always dreamed of—I'd helped two of my friends to find happiness; I'd played the loyal, self-effacing friend who brought together the storm-tossed pair, so that they could steer into the quiet harbor at last. Now that Lucile had found her Bayard, I supposed I was through. But of course if they needed me——

"Well, what are you going to do?" Wyman asked her. "Have you any money? And what did you say to Frank? And what did he say to you?"

"Oh, it's a long story. I've got so much to tell you. Oh! We'll have a nice long talk, won't we? Just like old times. I can hardly wait."

"Don can take you to dinner to-night, in my place," I suggested. "I'll be busy, anyway; I'll have to get downtown before long, and square things with Mrs. Clevenger. It begins to look as if she isn't coming back."

Then we had to tell Wyman what had happened, and it was a dreary recital; for time was continuing to pass, and everybody was continuing not to come to the party. I saw that they both felt a certain constraint; they had so many things to say to each other that ought not wait on the banalities of tea-table chatter.

"Look here," I suggested. "My party's gone to pieces; that's plain enough. It's half-past five; Agnes Clevenger would never be half an hour late unless she had to dress up in some clothes she wasn't

used to. She isn't coming. And I don't think my other guests will turn up——"

"Why not?" Lucile asked.

I thought I knew why not. Mrs. Whitlow had finally set her foot down on Hazel's association with me, after that clandestine drive up the river; the word had gone forth that I was no more to be allowed. Or perhaps Hazel had become merciful at last; she would let me alone . . . I was so far gone that I didn't want to be let alone. However, I couldn't tell Lucile all this.

"It's too late now," I said. "Nobody's coming. I'll telephone for a car, and you and Wyman can take a drive and talk things over. Then he can send you to a hotel, and I'll meet him—where shall we say? Harvard Club at ten? And we'll see what can be done. How about that?"

"But what becomes of your party?"

"Never mind my party," I said gloomily.

She protested that somebody might still appear, so for the next ten minutes we made a cheerless pretense of eating sandwiches and drinking tea. Then they agreed that they might as well go; and I felt a sensation of profound thankfulness when at last Wyman and Lucile, and Lucile's suitcases and Lucile's dogs, were stowed away in a big car and disappeared around the corner.

I wanted to sit down and rest, but there was no time for that. Action must be taken, and at once, if I wanted to prevent the collapse of Wyndham College's campaign for an endowment fund. It was nearly six; I'd have to put my silver tea set and the

best cups back in the kitchenette, send the rest of the food down the dumbwaiter to the janitor's family, and then go out and hunt Agnes. I might be able to explain—after all, the truth was harmless enough, if I could get her to believe it; and if I could not explain I might be able to win her over somehow; I had done more difficult things than that with Agnes when I put my mind on her.

But just as I laid hands on the tea things the doorbell clattered. I'd left the door ajar, and I supposed it was the telephone girl with the day's bundle of checks for my signature.

"Come in!" I shouted.

The door opened and closed. I looked up at Hazel—Hazel, alone and unchaperoned, and as refreshing as a breath of cool wind.

"Hello!" she said cheerfully. "Am I too late for the party?"

XXV.

Rarity of Christian Charity.

“**Y**OU'RE never too late for any party of mine,” I told her. “Cream or lemon?”
She looked at the empty rooms, the seven teacups——

“Why, where is the party?”

“You're it. The bottom has dropped out of the rest of it.”

“Didn't they come?”

“Oh, yes, they came, all of them. But they didn't stay.”

“I know I oughtn't to stay,” said Hazel, “if there's nobody here but you and me. But I do want to hear about it, and I'm absolutely famished. Had an awful time getting rid of Sarah—finally left her looking at hats at Reinach's, while I sneaked out. I'm dreadfully late, I know; but I didn't dare tell her . . . Lemon, please; and three lumps. Oh, what heavenly sandwiches!”

She hadn't wanted to be merciful, and I was glad. And she wasn't afraid I'd kill her. Well, she was safe. By this time I knew enough to stop when somebody waved the red flag. All I asked was to look at her; look at her sitting in my apartment as if she belonged there.

When she'd eaten three or four sandwiches she had time to ask:

"But where are all the others? Didn't you say Mrs. Clevenger was coming? And your—your guest? Has she gone?"

"Yes, she's gone."

"For good?"

"Yes, thank God. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered. I noticed that yellow silk stocking twisted in your bookrack——"

"Lord, did she leave that?"

Hazel looked at me and my well housekept apartment, then slowly grinned.

"You've been getting into trouble, haven't you? Tell me about it."

I told her about it—told her as much as I could, about Lucile and Wyman and everything. It was a relief to find something I could tell her, and she seemed to understand.

"So Mrs. Clevenger has dropped you?"

"I'm going to see her to-night," I said cheerlessly. "Maybe I can explain it away."

"She'll never believe you. Oh, yes, I believe you; but—— This affair of yours, you know, is just a little unusual—a little exotic—well, I don't know what you call it, but I'll bet you a box of cigars against a dozen roses that your story won't get over."

She looked positively gleeful, as if she didn't want it to get over. I couldn't see why she wanted to play the cat in the manger.

"You poor thing," she burst out. "Mrs. Torrey

ought to put somebody in charge of you, instead of making you look after other people. Honestly, Alec—— Well, she's gone now, of course."

"Agnes?"

"No, the other one. Lucile. And she isn't coming back. That helps. Does she still owe you money?"

"Yes, but that's nothing. Lots of people owe me money."

"Of course it's nothing," said Hazel. "You know it's nothing, and I know it's nothing. But how about a jury?"

"A jury?"

"Well, she has a husband, you know. You're lucky he didn't pick up her trail and find her here. And even if you can cover that up for all time, she still owes you money. Didn't it occur to you, Alec, that a young man who lends a lady money to leave her husband might let himself in for an alienation suit? Of course not; you wouldn't think of that. And you're so good-natured that it wouldn't have made any difference anyway. You were just nice and kind and helpful. But everything sounds bad when they tell it to a jury."

"I don't see what else I could have done. Anyway, her husband didn't come; that's one thing to be thankful for."

"And if he comes now—— Well, Mr. Wyman's looking after her now, isn't he?"

"Yes, Mr. Wyman is looking after her now. But I don't know—— I can't help thinking——"

"That's the only thing that's the matter with you," said Hazel. "You can't help thinking. It's bad for you. Stop thinking and tell me about some of these pictures. College photographs, I suppose? The college Mrs. Clevenger was going to give all that money to?"

"That's it."

"Why—Alec, I never knew you played on the football team."

"Oh, yes," I said wearily. "I wasn't always a mouse."

"Mouse?" The green eyes glinted fire. "Why do you knock yourself? And it was sweet of you to send in these carnations. They're my sorority flower."

"Lucile did that," I explained conscientiously. "They happen to be her sorority flower, too."

"Now what can you do with a man like that?" she muttered.

What you could do with a man like that, it seemed, was to talk to him, eagerly and bubblingly, on every subject in the world, and soothe his nerves so much that he almost forgot that certain things were out of reach. When she finally had to go I took her downtown in a taxi and left her at the Plaza, my eyes following that jaunty figure deep into the dimness of the lobby . . .

"Where to?" asked the driver.

"To the Ritz," I groaned.

I was going to have it out with Agnes. No more indirections; no more sentiment. We would talk

bald, brutal truth. I telephoned up, and a maid who took my message reported that Mrs. Clevenger wouldn't see me.

"Tell her she must see me," I said. "Tell her I can explain everything."

A pause.

"Mrs. Clevenger says, sir, that she doesn't believe you could explain anything."

So much for that. If Agnes had a headache, which seemed not improbable, I was lost; she'd dine in her suite. But if she came down to the dining room I could still catch her. I sat down in the lobby and waited.

When I had waited half an hour or so, she stepped out of the elevator—the same elevator from which she had emerged into our riotous night at the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. She wore the same evening gown of blue brocade that had dazzled me that night. But now there was no embarrassed expectancy about her, no anticipated joy of viewing sinful revels with proper disapproval. Agnes had got an eyeful of sin.

I headed her off as she started toward the dining room.

"Don't make a scene!" she cried. "Don't make a scene!"

"There will be no scene," I promised, "unless you make it. I merely want you to come over here in a corner of the lounge, and sit down, and listen to me for a few minutes. If you do that, there will be no scene. If you won't do that, you can call one of the porters and have him try to throw me out. I

think I can whip any one in sight, and maybe any two. Eventually, of course, you could get a policeman, and I'd spend a night in the station house and lose my job. But I'd rather do that than miss this chance."

The old iron hand was still effective. Shivering, she followed me to a seat in a secluded corner of the lounge, where nobody was near us.

"This is all wrong," I began. "All a misunderstanding."

"It certainly is. My misunderstanding of your character. Those suspicions that I strove to stifle for your sainted father's sake——"

"What suspicions?"

"The way you talked to me that day we came up from Asbury Park, about my personal appearance. You said things nobody had ever said before——"

"I said you were beautiful," I reminded her.

"Well, that was true, of course. But the remarks you made about my clothes—no virtuous young man would have known what I needed."

"But you took my advice."

"I had long felt that it might be advisable for me to devote more attention to personal adornment. You knew just what I wanted and just where to get it—— Oh, don't think I believe that story about asking your friend's wife. You called up one of those women . . . Dr. Deupree, I suspected from that moment that you had been depraved by residence in New York. Soon I knew it. You betrayed a suspicious familiarity with cafes——"

"I wanted to show you the town," I apologized.

"You did, and it was just what I expected."

"Yes," I said fiercely, "it was just what you expected. You wouldn't let me show you the places where people live and work. You wanted to go out and see the picture of New York you'd brought with you. You wanted to go to places where people from out of town wave their money and hammer on the table for a waiter; the places that are kept open so visitors won't feel that their vacations have been spoiled. You went with me——"

"Well, I thought if you would go to such places, and lead that kind of life, you'd be better off for the company of a good, pure woman whose influence might recall you to better things."

"But you liked it."

"I thought it was awful," said Agnes in majestic sincerity. "But I felt that you'd better be with me than with one of those terrible creatures——"

"I don't associate with terrible creatures."

"Well, I don't know what you call them in New York, but—— Who was that girl that answered the telephone when I called your apartment on Sunday? Who was the girl you were running around with at Maplecrest?"

"Leave her out of this," I warned her.

"There seem to be enough of them left in this, even with one or two left out. Poor thing, she was young, too. And who was this girl you were shamelessly embracing this afternoon——"

"She was an old friend," I said. "A very old and dear friend——"

"I gathered that the acquaintance had progressed beyond the initial stages."

"Listen," I said. "That girl regards me as a brother——"

"Pray do not continue. You are not skilled in falsehoods."

"Well," I groaned, "I certainly don't have much luck at making people believe the truth."

"Practice makes perfect," said Agnes. "But enough of this. I—oh, I wouldn't mind it if you'd only been honest with me. I am broad-minded. I know what men are like. I remember your sainted father saying that that Kentucky blood would come out, and it has. Doctor Deupree, you are a—a sheik, I believe is the term. But I don't mind that. No. What I can't stand is your trying to palm off on me this ridiculous tissue of falsehoods about girls that regard you as a brother. I am no inexperienced schoolgirl, to be gulled with such a story. I am a woman of the world!"

"Don't make a scene," I begged her.

"I'm not making a scene," said Agnes. "This isn't a scene; and even if it is, whose fault is it? Oh, I—I ought to have known better; but I—I was pleased, when you wanted to show me the town. I lead a lonely life; we who devote ourselves to unselfish improvement of our fellowmen must be lonely. We live on the heights which few can attain. I needed a friend. I was flattered by your attention, and—I liked you. Your mode of life, of course, I could not approve; but you had possibilities that

could be developed under a good influence. So I let you take me around.

"And what was your purpose, Dr. Deupree? What was your purpose? Oh, I know. You thought you had to deal with an inexperienced girl. You took me to plays whose flippant dialogue might undermine the foundations of my character. You took me to cafes, that I might become familiar with luxurious debauchery and take it for granted. You put the wine glass to my lips——"

"I didn't!"

"Well, I don't know what you call it."

"That wasn't wine. It bubbled, but it was only cider and soda water."

She shook her head with a pitying smile.

"Cider and soda water would never have given me the mad exhilaration I felt that night, or the headache I had next morning. Yes, it was a mad exhilaration. I confess it. I have my human weaknesses. Any other woman would have been an easy victim, that night; but you realized the innate strength of my character, Dr. Deupree, and it gave you pause. You turned to easier prey, to more facile amusement; and then, sated with debauchery, you come to me with this girl's kisses hot on your lips, and beg me to take you back."

"I never begged you to take me, back or anywhere else," I howled. "I came here to-night because you're an old friend of the family, and I wanted to tell you the truth and save the family reputation. And I can't get it over, because I haven't brains enough to tell a lie. That family reputation has

haunted me all my life—spotlessly white, not a blot on the 'scutcheon. I wish my ancestors had been socially inefficient, and had been segregated before they ever produced me . . . Well—I'm through."

"Not yet," said Agnes. "I cannot let you go without one last appeal. Be fair to—to the unfortunate companion of your folly. I have not the narrow attitude of many good women toward such creatures. Whatever may have been her past, deep down in the soul of every woman lurks some spark of hope. Keep that spark alight, Dr. Deupree! You have dragged this poor creature down, now lift her up again. Atone for your wrong. Marry her!"

"But I can't marry her," I expostulated. "She's married already, and as soon as she gets rid of her husband she's going to marry somebody else."

"Well," she sighed, "this is all too complicated for me. I can't keep up with you New Yorkers."

"I know it," I said fiercely. "If Miss Spivey—"

"Do not presume to criticize Miss Spivey. I told you I needed a friend. Well, I've found one. And, as a mark of my confidence in her, I've given half a million dollars to the Home for Orphans of the Tobacco Habit. It will all be in the papers to-morrow morning."

XXVI.

Elective Affinities.

I HAD some two hours to reflect on this total and irreparable disaster—disaster to me, disaster to my college—before I was to meet Wyman. I spent those two hours thinking sad thoughts, and when I found him in the Harvard Club his face was as gloomy as my own.

“Well,” he said lugubriously, leading me to a remote corner where we could hide our collective despair from strangers, “what are we going to do with Lucile?”

“What have you done with her now? Hotel or hospital?”

“Oh, I sent her down to the Martha Washington. I didn’t want to risk any more mixups. But that doesn’t settle anything. What next?”

“She told me she wanted to be economically independent,” I said. “I suppose that means go to work. Has she suggested anything definite?”

“Oh, yes. She’s suggested ten or fifteen things definite. Just at present she intends to sell perfumes and cosmetics, unless she’s changed her mind in the last half-hour and decided to be a tea-room hostess, or design costumes for pageants, or write plays.”

"But she'll have money soon," I reminded him.

"Her own money. She's selling her jewels."

"So she told me. But that won't last long."

"Oh, surely——"

"Yes, surely. You see, you knew her in college, when she was poor—before she'd got used to spending the ill-gotten gains of a grain speculator. She's an extravagant little thing, Alec. She's never tried to make her own living. She thinks all she needs is to try, and the living will come easy. Hah! Look at us, Alec. Gentlemen, university graduates, polished representatives of the intellectual proletariat. I'm a competent and experienced magazine editor, and my writings are praised by persons of discernment. But the best job I ever had paid six thousand a year . . . That job in Chicago . . . You're a brilliant young scholar, a recognized authority on something or other; but in your business you'll never make more than six thousand a year, and lucky to get that. Yet Lucile, who looks on six thousand a year as downright poverty, thinks she can make as much as she needs by doing something ladylike. Why, the only thing she can really do well is to wheedle money out of impressionable men like you and her husband. I must say, Alec, it looks pretty blue."

"Why should it look blue to you?" I demanded. "Evidently she hasn't told you this, and I shouldn't tell you. It's none of my business. But I can't remain silent and let my two best friends wreck their lives through a misunderstanding. She's too proud to tell you, you're too modest to see it; but this idea

of economic independence and living her own life and so on is only a stop-gap, a substitute, that she picked up when she thought you'd gone out of her life forever. Now that she's found you again, she'll marry you as soon as you ask her."

"Marry me?"

"Certainly, marry you . . . Why, aren't you going to marry her? She told me—you told me yourself——"

"Oh, I'd like to marry her, of course. But you can't steal a man's wife when you owe him money. It isn't done."

"Then you'll have to pay him."

"Pay him? Ten thousand dollars? My God! I couldn't accumulate that much in ninety years."

"Then you'll have to sink your scruples," I said desperately, "and marry her before you pay him. You can't leave her flat."

"But I can't marry her till she divorces Pemberton. How is she going to do it? In New York there's no ground but infidelity; she'd have to sue in Illinois. And the law there requires two years' desertion before you can get a decree—oh, yes, we looked it all up when life was brighter and the world was young—even if we could make it look as if he deserted her, when she's deserted him."

"Surely you could find some other grounds——"

"Pemberton's hell to live with, but he's a model husband. Never looks at a woman, drinks next to nothing, never beat his wife——"

"Yet she found him unendurable. Surely there must have been some act of brutality—— Ah, I re-

member now. She spoke of his—er—laying violent hands on her——”

“Oh, yes,” said Wyman, “she told me about that. He shook her. What of it? Do you blame him? I’ve shaken her myself. Haven’t you?”

“No, but I’ve wanted to. But that’s different. If you shake her, or I shake her, it’s only a playful little fuss. But if her husband shakes her—extreme and intolerable cruelty.”

“It wouldn’t get by,” he prophesied. “No. The only way we could free her—within a couple of years at any rate—would be to let Pemberton take action.”

“Pemberton? Against Lucile?”

“Oh, I don’t want to be understood as advocating it. I abhor the thought quite as much as you. I’m merely pointing out that that’s the only way she can free herself without a long delay.”

“But if he had to wait two years before he got his decree——”

“That’s for desertion,” he reminded me.

“What else could he charge?”

“Well,” said Wyman judicially, “of course he might find out—we might let him find out—that she’d spent a week-end in your apartment. That would turn the trick.”

“No,” I swore. “No. I’m damned if it would. Because Billy Bonner would swear that I stayed with him. And I’d see to it that he was on hand to say his say. I’m going to protect Lucile’s name——”

“Oh, of course, my dear boy. You’re entirely

right. It wouldn't do at all. I'm merely pointing out that if we cared to do it, as of course we don't, that's the only way we could do it. Since we don't care to do it, why, as they say in diplomacy, we must be prepared to envisage the consequences. So there we are."

"There we are," I granted, "but where is it?"

"She and I went over all this at dinner," said Wyman. "It's quite clear—appallingly, ruinously clear. And you have a right to know all, since you've been so helpful to us. The fact is, we—we yield to Fate. We must give it up—must be content to be only friends. Too many obstacles in the way of the other . . . Oh, of course it broke our hearts to do it; and we hated it particularly because we knew it would be such a blow to you——"

"To me?"

— "Why, yes. We saw how happy you felt over having got us together again, and believe me, Alec, it wasn't easy to make up our minds to give you such a shock. If there was any way we could have avoided it, we'd have done it; but after all, you can't expect us both to ruin our futures merely to save your feelings . . . It was an idyllic affair, Alec, the most inspiring thing that has ever happened to me. Its impress is indelibly graven in my personality; I shall be able to write much more vividly now. But it was so idyllic that we felt it best to let it remain only a dream of what might have been; the sordid realities of everyday life together would only have dulled the exquisite memory of those golden hours. So we must part."

"Part?" I stammered. "Well, yes, I suppose so, if you must. Part technically, at least. But you and I are going to have to stand by Lucile. She'll need introductions, she'll need encouragement—you know how she needs encouragement; she may even need money——"

"I can give her any amount of introductions," he promised, "and all sorts of encouragement. But if it comes to a question of money—well, I'm out of a job, and they say this is going to be a hard summer for free lances."

"And just for that," I cried, "you'd let the whole thing go? When it's cost you your job already, and Lucile her home? Wyman, you're a fool. You're a coward. If a girl cared for me like that I'd go through with it, scandal or no scandal, money or no money. If you were only big enough——"

"Don't say that," he begged. "It hurts. I ought to keep this to myself, Alec; it's a caddish thing to say. But after all you know everything else about this affair, so you might as well know this. It's Lucile who isn't big enough. I feel strong enough to carry it through against any odds; but Lucile—you know how volatile she is. Lovely little creature, but I can't be sure of her. She's changeable. She isn't enough in earnest. She means well, but she wouldn't see it through. So she goes her own way, and I go mine."

He put on his hat and went his own way; out into the night, out into this big, cold world, out into Forty-fourth Street. So this was the end of it all——

Then I realized that it was a long way from the end. Lucile was still in New York, with the firm purpose of realizing her individuality and living her own life. If Wyman had gone his own way, somebody else would have to look after her.

I seemed to be holding the sack.

XXVII.

There's a Great Text in Galatians.

THE sunlight of Wednesday morning woke me in a room still redolent of the fragrance that had been imported from Chicago. Lucile, in college, had never used anything more violent than vanilla face powder. It was a more recently acquired taste, this Oriental perfume that was luxuriant and tantalizing and agreeable, at first, but got on one's nerves horribly in course of time. I'd liked it, yesterday; this morning I knew that I'd never get used to it. And yet, very likely, I'd have to get used to it.

To get up or not to get up—there seemed nothing in life worth getting up for, yet I had a vague remembrance that something was going to be in the morning paper. I climbed out of bed, picked the paper from the doorsill—yes, there it was. Half a column about the gift of half a million to the Home for Orphans of the Victims of the Tobacco Habit, by Mrs. Agnes Haldeman Clevenger; a philanthropist already well known in the Middle West, who intended to make her home in New York hereafter in order to be in closer touch with the headquarters of various movements in which she was interested.

In that sentence lay the sting, for the friends of

Wyndham College. Agnes wouldn't miss half a million, and at any rate Miss Spivey and Wyman and I had accomplished one thing—we'd kept her away from Gushmore. But she was going to stay in New York, a city full of movements, of worthy and less worthy causes in recurring need of donations; and every little movement had a payroll all its own. Wyndham would never get any more from Agnes.

For Agnes, hereafter, would never be able to think of Wyndham without remembering me. If only I'd let her alone—if I hadn't tried to show her the town! For now that she'd seen the town, she was going to stay. She probably told herself that New York needed her, which perhaps was true; but it was just as true that the reconstructed Agnes needed New York. She'd outgrown Indianapolis; but New York, alive with worthy causes, crawling with uplifters, could keep her—as it could keep anybody—busy every moment at the things she liked best. She was going to realize her personality, to live her own life. Of course she must live in New York.

Not in my New York, to be sure; but it's a large town, with room for all of us. And nobody would ever need to show Agnes the town, or anything else. She made the world she lived in, home-brewed it in the recesses of her soul. What she wanted to see she would see, wherever she went. For she saw with the eye of faith—saw the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Cider and soda water would always be champagne to her.

Yet my great experiment hadn't been in vain.

Agnes had learned that she was beautiful, had learned how to stay beautiful; and her emotions had been stirred. She had been mine for the taking, if I had played her right, and I had booted the chance. Now that it was gone forever I began to realize its worth. She had money and beauty and character; not the sort of character I'd like to have around the house, but, working on the foundation of her dawning affection, I might have made renovations there too. Agnes would go far; whoever married her would go far with her.

For of course she'd marry, before long. She'd been waked up; she'd want to stay awake. Others would begin where I had left off; with her beauty and her money, and a certain hard-headedness that I hadn't appreciated till it was too late, she'd be sure to marry well. I wouldn't be the lucky one to go far in her company; before long she'd look back with incredulous horror on the fit of emotional insanity when she might have married an assistant professor. No, she'd marry in her own class; the statue that I had hewn from the shapeless block of marble would pass from the artist's hands to its proper destination, a rich man's home where the artist would never see it again.

Yes, I'd been the making of Agnes. But she wouldn't remember that; she'd remember only that she'd caught me embracing Lucile, and that I'd never embraced her.

Ah, well—Agnes belonged to the past; all that was settled. What of the future? There was reason to fear that that was settled, too.

There's a great text in Galatians—once you trip on it—entails twenty-nine distinct damnations, one sure if another fails. My tripping and damnatory text had been that casual remark of Fan's, that nobody ever thought of me in that way. No woman did, for herself; but every woman did when it was a question of another woman. Those affectionate friendships, so much alike yet each one graced with a personal flavor, had ruined me. The personal touch convinced every woman that our relation was unique, that she was the only one who appealed to me in this platonic way. It followed, then, that the others could command their share of my time only by the most deplorable allurements. Hence damnation on damnation, with more damnation yet to come.

Damnation, with the woman who'd planned life with me, seven years ago, as a pilgrimage toward the True, the Beautiful, and the Good? That long silent interval between marriage and death was to have been filled with unflagging raptures, and the exemplification of the loftiest ideals. But that was seven years ago.

Other things had changed in those seven years apart, but I could have disregarded them. The inconvenience of a scandalous divorce, which seemed highly probable; the paralyzing impossibility of supporting Lucile's tastes; even this sickish inescapable perfume that clung to the rooms in which she lived—I could have stood it all, if I could only have recaptured the breathless excitement of those old days. But it wasn't there. Not a thrill.

If we'd married seven years ago, everything would have been different. Pursuit of the True, the Beautiful and the Good might not have been unremitting; but at any rate Lucile would have got used to a professor's salary, and I could have kept her from using sickly perfume or singing mushy songs. Above all, the electric current that used to thrill us could have been prisoned in storage batteries, and with reasonable care would have run the machinery and kept the lamps alight for a lifetime. Now it was gone—diffused in the atmosphere, a useless and interfering static. Twenty-nine distinct damnations.

However, Lucile had no theological ancestry and no taste for black reflection. She seemed to think the current was still turned on; and since she was evidently left on my hands I might as well make the best of her. We Deuprees are always happy when we can work up a good conviction of sin and set ourselves for a well-deserved chastening; I presently found myself so cheerful that it seemed desirable to get back to actuality by reading the morning paper. Optimism, surviving with difficulty the front-page news, vanished completely on page 2; for there was an interview on the industrial outlook in the Middle West as it seemed to Frank Pemberton of Chicago, who had just arrived at the Biltmore.

Thankful that Lucile and I were six miles apart, I called her up, and presently heard a sleepy voice explaining that the ankle was lots better, thanks, and felt as if it could be walked on to-day.

"Did you know your husband is in town?" I asked.

"No! My goodness! Where?"

I told her.

"Then he'll hunt through all the hotels, and by noon he'll have found me. I ought to have stayed in your apartment."

"Oh, no," I said. "Far from it. Just as far as possible. But he'll probably find you; and what shall we do then?"

"Oh, I'm too sleepy to think just now. Come down right away."

I found her in the dining room, somewhat cheered by coffee and an omelette.

"We can't talk here," she began nervously. "He might walk in on us at any moment. You'd better take a taxi, and then we can ride around while we think it over."

There would be no taxi money in the dark times coming. We'd have to skimp, and we might as well start now.

"Let's go out," I suggested, "if you can walk. There's a churchyard down the street; we can sit there."

"Ideal," she agreed. "Frank would never think of looking for me around a church."

So she limped out, clinging to my arm, and we found a bench in the churchyard, with moss-covered forgotten gravestones buried in the grass around us. This atmosphere of death and the sarcophagus depressed me, but I couldn't ask her to walk farther.

"Now what?" she asked. "Is there anything he can do to me?"

"Nothing but divorce you."

"Well! If that's all——"

"That's all he can do—to you."

"Why, Alec? What can he do to you?"

"Why, I suppose he might bring an alienation suit—but no. No shrewd business man would ever sue a professor."

"He isn't that kind, anyway," she added cheerfully. "He has such a fearful temper. I was the only one who could do anything with him; I suppose he's uncontrollable now. He won't sue. He's more likely to kill us."

"Let us strive to look at the silver lining," I proposed, "rather than the cloud."

"There isn't any silver lining," she wailed. "Celestine hasn't sent the check yet. Something must have happened to her."

I thought that most probably Celestine had decided to seize a heaven-sent opportunity and find her place in the sun; but I didn't want to weight down the occasion with any further discouragement.

"It's only Wednesday," I reminded her. "You left Chicago on Saturday. She probably hasn't had time to put the sale through as yet. And don't worry about money; I'll stand by you."

"You dear boy! I always knew you'd be loyal—through fire. I don't want to be a burden on you, but—you don't mind my owing you money just a little longer? You're the only man in the world

from whom I could accept it, but I've always felt that you were—different, somehow, if you understand the way I feel about it."

"I understand you," I said. "Everybody that knows me well feels that way about it. I wish your husband knew me well. Now Wyman said you were going into business as a perfumer. Do you still——"

"I think that would be a good idea, don't you? I know such a lot about perfumes and cosmetics, and everybody says I have a remarkable taste——"

"I know that; my bedroom will be scented for a week. But it takes something more than taste to start a business—your money, of course, if Celestine sends you a check for the jewelry. But it will take time to build up a clientele."

"I have a great many friends," said Lucile. "Most of them in Chicago, of course, but they all come to New York when they want anything really—spiff. So I think I ought to be able to build up a pretty good business. I could write scenarios, or something, to keep things going while I was getting started. What do you think? You see, I've got only you to depend on now. Some men would think I was a burden, but you're not like other men. Did Don tell you that we had decided to part?"

"To part, or not to meet, or something like that."

"We did our best to find some other way out," she said dolefully. "But we couldn't. You see, I love Don dearly, Alec. No other man has ever meant to me—not even you—or could ever mean to

me what Don has meant. But we couldn't have been happy together. It was a beautiful romance, a beautiful dream; but a marriage between us would not have been happy. I am convinced of that. For—I couldn't say this to anybody but you, Alec—I couldn't be sure of him. Besides, Don and I both live for self-expression, and our egos might have clashed. What I need to make me happy is a man who is sympathetic and dependable, and always kind."

It seemed to me that the logic of events was designating one such with alarming rapidity, so I hastened to carry the conversation back to that perfumery shop, and to run over a list of friends of Wyman's and mine who might help her get started.

"That sounds awfully encouraging," she admitted with more cheerfulness than she'd shown all morning. "Only—Don is a darling, Alec, of course; but you and I know him well enough to know we can't count much on him. He'll do what he can; but I'll have to lean hard on you, Alec."

"That's what I seem to be for," I said with a sudden burst of sympathy. "You poor, lonesome, ill-used child, I'll stand by you to the limit. Don't worry about that."

I was in for it now; I could tell that from the way she squeezed my hand.

"I might even find some capital for you," I said, as a sudden and encouraging thought struck me. "Capital that wouldn't arouse any—suspicions."

"You mean Mrs. Clevenger?"

"No, not Mrs. Clevenger. I was thinking of my

cousin, Edith Torrey. Her husband is made of money. He and Edith are pretty good at holding on to it, but maybe—— And perhaps Hazel Deming——”

“Who in the world is Hazel Deming?” Lucile asked. “I’ve heard you say a lot about her, but you never——”

She broke off suddenly, clutching my arm.

“Alec! Did you see that man—the one who just passed? The one with the panama? It looked like Frank—I couldn’t be sure.”

“Which way was he going?”

“That way. What is it—west?”

“Then he was going away from the hotel,” I assured her.

“Then we’d better go back,” and she rose with the aid of a hand on my shoulder. “I wouldn’t want him to catch us here. If he comes to the hotel to-day, I’ll say I’m sick. To-morrow, when my ankle’s well enough so that I can r-run if I have to, I might talk to him. Particularly if Celestine sends the check.”

“Do you need any more money?”

“No, not just now. You don’t know how much better it’s made me feel to talk to you. Last night I was so gloomy, when I saw that Don and I couldn’t—— I cried half the night. But to-day life looks brighter. Frank never understood me; he was always so cold and harsh. And with Don I always felt that I was stronger than he was, and that in a crisis I’d have to be brave for him and myself too. But you’re different. You’ve given me

some—some golden memories, in these last few days. And I know I can lean on you. You dear!”

She did lean on me, literally, till we'd got back to the hotel in safety, and she waved me a cheery goodbye from the elevator.

“I'm going to be good and doctor the ankle. I'll leave you to look out for Frank.”

“I'll look out for Frank,” I promised as the car started up. And then, as I turned toward the door, there arose from an uncomfortable wooden chair in an obscure corner of the lobby the figure of a man in a brown suit and a derby hat, with a primly cropped mustache and a hard, business-like gray eye. He arose and came toward me, reaching into an inner pocket, and I could see the headlines in the next edition of the evening papers: “Columbia Professor Slain in Hotel Lobby; Chicago Millionaire Vindicates Unwritten Law.”

But the hand, when it reappeared, held nothing but a cigar-case; and he paused to bite the end off a panetela before he came up to me with his hand held out.

“Morning, Dr. Deupree. Don't know if you remember me? Name's Pemberton. Have a cigar?”

I had it; what's more, I managed to light it without a quaver.

“Saw you come in with my wife,” he went on. “Thought you and I might sit down somewhere and talk this thing over.”

“This place is as good as any,” I said, for I didn't want him to see my knees shaking.

He frowned.

"Can't smoke here. Oh, well, we can talk, anyway. You damn fool, why did you send her to your apartment? You oughtn't to have done that. I suppose you meant well enough, but it looked bad."

"How did you know?" I gasped.

"Oh, I knew she'd come to you whenever she left me. She's been threatening to leave me whenever she was mad for years. And whenever she got good and mad, she'd tell me how much happier she'd have been if she'd married you. So when I saw she was getting more and more obstreperous I looked you up and found out what had become of you, and as soon as she left home I called up a detective agency and had her followed."

"Then you——"

"I was worried," he admitted, "when I first got to town and they gave me an outline of what had happened. But they'd pumped your hall boys and telephone girl, so they'd found out it wasn't as bad as it looked. And I went up this morning and had a talk with this fellow Bonner. Guess I scared him a little bit when he found out who I was, but he's a friend of yours all right; he lied from here to kingdom come. But patchin' his story together with what I knew already I could see that nothing had—happened. I didn't think anything had, anyway. She's a fool, but she's not that kind of a fool; and I'd had the detectives find out something about you, and they told me you were nothing to be scared of."

"I suppose she was broke," he went on. "But you could have lent her enough money to go to a hotel, instead of——"

"I did lend her money," I explained, "but not till the next day. It was Sunday and I was broke."

"Hmph!" he said, pulling out a roll of bills. "How much did you lend her?"

"I'm afraid I can't go into details in a personal matter of that sort," I said stiffly. "Whatever I lent her is between Lucile and myself."

"I don't propose to have my wife borrow money from anybody but me," he growled. "I don't care how much you lend her, but I'll have to lend it to you first. It's all got to come from me."

"It won't," I said. "Your wife has left you for reasons which may be good or bad, but reasons of her own at any rate. She doesn't want to have anything to do with you. As long as she doesn't, I'll do what I can to help her; and you can sue me and be damned."

We glowered at each other for a moment like a couple of roosters; then he put his money back in his pocket.

"Oh, all right," he grumbled. "But what does she think she's going to do now?"

"You'll have to get any details that you may want from her," I warned him. "But I suppose I can tell you that she means to go into business."

"Who is the goat? She hasn't got any money."

"She may——" I stopped, but he understood.

"You mean her jewels? Oh, Celestine knows which side her bread is buttered on. She came to me with the bag right off."

This was a catastrophe. Still——

"She has friends who will back her," I asserted boldly. "Women."

"Back her in what?"

"I believe she intends to sell perfumes and cosmetics."

"Hmph! Well, she might be able to sell 'em; she's bought enough. Look here, Deupree, there's no use of our beatin' around the bush. I take it you want to do whatever is best for her, don't you? I do. Now let's get together. Oh, I know the stuff she's handed you. Wants to realize her individuality; to live her own life. Says I don't understand her."

"Why, if I didn't understand her and myself from A to Z, we couldn't have lived together six months. I've always understood her; that's why she's sore. Now I want to see her contented. If she thinks it'll make her any happier to run a perfumery shop in New York, instead of running my house in Chicago, I'm willing to let her try it, but I'll pay the freight. I can afford it and you can't."

"I'm afraid you don't understand her," I objected. "What she wants is to do things for herself——"

"Now look here," said Pemberton confidentially. "If you'd lived with her for seven years you'd know just how much Lucile can do for herself. It's not an awful lot. Shes no genius. You say I don't understand her. Why, I know that girl's—soul, I suppose she calls it—inside out and backward. Excuse me if I seem crude, but I understood her well

enough to get her away from you once, and by God, if I have to, I'll do it again.

"She started this talk about running off and leaving me on our honeymoon, but it was six years before she went. Nobody else could have held her that long. And after she's had her fling she'll come right back home, and like it. I know her.

"Now you may think—and I suppose you do—that she'll start in this business and get rich, and leave me flat forever. Don't you believe it. You never had to pay her bills. I don't care how big a trade she got, she'd never make money. It isn't in her. And as long as somebody has got to put up a wad for her to spend, I'll do it myself. I'm used to it. She's finally made good on her talk, and she's got to have her fling before she comes back. I don't care what she does so long as she doesn't hook up with some rat-eyed pussy cat of a so-called man, and start out as a dance team. That I won't stand for. But if anything else will amuse her, I'll put up the money till she gets tired of her playthings and toddles back home. She's a damn little fool, but I like her."

"At any rate," I advised, "let her alone for a day or two. She's a little bit afraid of you now, and she's hurt her ankle——"

"Yes, the detectives told me about that. How is it?"

"Oh, it's much better; you've seen that she could walk, with help. But it's affected her nerves a little."

“Yes, I suppose it would. All right; I’ll hold off till to-morrow, anyway. And if you see her again to-day, I wish you’d tell her to rub it with Olivinda Ointment. Best thing I know for a sprain.”

“Then you won’t do anything——”

“I won’t try to see her till to-morrow. But I wish you’d tell her I want to talk to her then. I won’t bite her; all I want is to get things straightened out. And for the Lord’s sake don’t lend her any more money. This is my party. And from what I’ve heard about this visit to your apartment, I don’t think you’ve got much more sense than she has.”

XXVIII.

Aphrodite in the Waves.

THE man was crude, but he inspired confidence. If I could have accepted his diagnosis and unloaded my burden on him life would have been brighter. But after all, this was Lucile's business; she'd run away from him, and I couldn't ship her back without asking her permission. So I merely told her, by telephone, that I'd talked to Frank; that he wasn't in a murderous mood; and that he wanted to see her to-morrow.

"He's going to tell me to come back to Chicago," she predicted. "I'll never do that."

"I don't think you'll find him unreasonable," I suggested. "But I'll stick by you, whatever happens."

It was the least I could say; but it committed me, good and hard. Perhaps she might go back to her husband—but I'd got used to the idea of having a woman on my hands, and celibacy would seem unnatural now.

I missed Agnes now that I had lost her; though I'd have hated life with her. I'd miss Lucile if I lost her, yet I'd go crazy if I had to live with her. Marriage, for me, would certainly mean that a lady's

firm foot would be planted on my neck; but I had worked up so much enthusiasm in the short-lived hope that it would be a certain foot shod in a gilded slipper that the neck would be lonesome with no foot at all.

Standing on the curb, I wondered what to do next. About the best thing would be to go down to the Aquarium and jump in; I should at least be in the company of my own kind. But no. There was one duty left, no matter what happened in the way of women, a duty that I didn't dare neglect much longer. My book. That learned work on apartment-house life in ancient Rome, which was to win me a promotion and boost my salary from three thousand to six. I'd need six thousand, and more, if I had to support Lucile. Better get to work.

So I went uptown in the subway, crossed the campus in rising discontent at the thought of spending this June afternoon cooped up in my rooms, and came down to the apartment-house. At the curb was a motor car, dark gray and solid and full chested—a Sagamore speedster; and in its single seat sat a girl in a cocky hat and a leaf-green dress.

"Aren't you the man about town?" she called. "I've been waiting here half an hour."

"How—— Why——" I stammered.

"How? Sarah has an awful sore throat. The doctor told her to go to bed and stay there till tomorrow morning. Why? I thought we'd better improve each shining hour—go down to Coney Island, for a swim and a look around."

"Wait till I get my bathing suit," I said.

In two minutes I climbed in beside her, and the car shot away with the admirable self-control of an organism that could go right through the tall buildings, if it wanted to, but was restrained by the strong hand of its mistress . . . I had felt that way, that night up the Hudson, till Hazel used her strong hand.

"You'd better stop downtown and buy a suit," I warned her. "I don't suppose you want to risk disturbing Mrs. Whitlow by running back to your rooms, and I can't recommend the ones you hire at the bath houses."

"Oh, I have my suit with me," she explained, holding up a silver mesh bag. Yes, it bulged; but it obviously didn't contain much of a bathing suit.

I shook my head.

"Won't it do?" she asked.

"It won't do at Coney. If you wear that anywhere within the city limits of New York you'll go to jail. This is a moral town."

"Well, I never! Do I have to buy another?"

"Not necessarily. There's still Long Beach, which is out in the country. There you can wear, within reasonable limits, anything. Coney is the resort of the poor, and we have to protect their morals. But Long Beach is the hang-out of the middle class, and nobody cares about their morals, they're so universally and conclusively damned anyway."

She groaned.

"I never knew how wicked I was till I came to New York. Long Beach it is, then."

"And don't try to kill any road hogs on the way," I begged her. "I need a rest."

"You're the only man who's ever had the nerve to ask me to be a rest for him," she sighed, "but an unlettered girl has to stand a lot from a professor."

Yet, with amazing kindness, she did rest me. We hardly spoke on the long slow drive, caught for the last ten miles in a steady column of automobiles taking summer commuters to their homes at the beach; but silence was a rest after Lucile. We got there rather late—too late for more than a few scattered bathers to be left in the surf, but too early for dinner; so we sprinted across the sand and into the ocean under a curtain fire of stares from the strollers and rolling-chair paraders on the boardwalk. This bathing suit was of a Californian scarcity that would hardly get by, even at Long Beach.

But in a moment we felt the swirl of cool water about knees and ankles, the salty torrent of a breaker over our heads. We dived through another wave, and then another; then she was swimming straight out with quick strong strokes that made me struggle to keep up with her.

The blue-green water was warm enough, and the fierce heat of afternoon was abating. We swam on under a silver-gray sky that shaded into a golden haze over the ocean to the westward; on and on, though she presently slackened speed. I stayed beside her, since it was probably my last chance to stay beside her. On and on through the haze, guided by the green cap sliding over the swells.

"Are we going anywhere in particular?" I asked

finally. She stopped, floated, and after looking me over for a moment demanded contemptuously:

"Tired?"

"No," I said. "I'm not tired. But there's nothing nearer than Bermuda in this direction—unless you're going out to meet Kenneth France's boat. He'll have all next week, and thereafter; you might as well leave me the rest of to-day."

"That seems fair," she agreed. "Want to go in?"

No, I didn't want to go in. The shore was almost out of sight—the shore of North America, a continent occupied by Lucile and Agnes and other persons whom I never wanted to see again. But I wasn't fish enough to keep on going forever.

"See the red buoy over yonder?" I asked. "I can beat you to it."

And I did, by a stroke. We were both tired enough, by the time that sprint was over, to welcome its support; she draped herself over its curved surface, chin wrestling on crossed wrists, toes anchored somewhere underneath, while I floated lightly with my hands on the buoy. When we rose on the swell the row of hotels and restaurants along the boardwalk was remotely visible, like a child's village of cardboard; farther out a sail or two was faint against the gray horizon, and from the luminous west toward Rockaway came the sputter of a motor-boat.

I spread out lazily in the warm water and laughed.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

Nothing was funny, or everything; there seemed

no room for compromise. It was, perhaps, amusing that Hazel had at last, like any other girl, turned to me for company when she was lonesome for the man she loved; still funnier that this thing of playing the unsatisfactory substitute, which I'd sworn off so firmly two weeks ago, should just at this moment be the most delightful occupation in the world.

The brooding green eyes looked down at me—mystifying and impersonal and reserved, for all their frank friendliness; eyes that could tell a hundred things, or more often nothing at all. But there was one thing I'd never seen in them—a trace of feeling, a flicker of tenderness. That was reserved for somebody else.

“What's happened to you?” she demanded impatiently. A number of things had happened to me; some of them were still happening, and seemed likely to go on happening for a long time to come. But she wouldn't be interested in that.

“Did you explain to Mrs. Clevenger?” she asked. “And what have you done with Mrs. Pemberton?”

I told her as much as I could of Agnes, and Lucile, and Lucile's husband, and the gentleman who wasn't going to be Lucile's next husband. There were—there had to be—discreet omissions; but Hazel was interested, and was polite enough not to be amused; I talked more volubly than I'd intended, and presently realized that I was doing to her what so many women had done to me—I was telling her the story of my life.

And seemingly I bored her, for while I was still talking she slid suddenly off the buoy with an abrupt

"I'm cold—let's go in," and started swimming landward. Startled, I was motionless for a moment, watching that flash of green and white driving through the water. Then I was after her, as hard as I could go. For we had been alone together for the last time—alone in the water, the world lost in a silver haze. Now she was going away from me, going away definitely and permanently. Oh, yes, we'd dine together—in a crowd; we'd drive back to town together—in a crowd; we'd meet from time to time at Edith's, even after she was married, but always in a crowd. I must catch up with her, bring her back to the buoy, prolong the moment . . .

But I couldn't catch up with her. I was a good swimmer, but she was a better one, swift and unwearyed, driving steadily onward toward the shore and the rest of the human race. The outward swim had been easy; but now I was chilled, numb, tired; every stroke was work, and work that grew harder. Why work? So long as she was ahead of me, why not drop back out of her sight? Why not let things go? I certainly had no bright prospects ashore; I might as well slide down gently out of sight and get it over with.

But I didn't, of course; partly because one doesn't, but more, I think, because I knew that this iron girl, if she looked around and didn't see me, would come back and hunt for me, probably dive for me, and very likely drag me ignominiously ashore to be revived in discomfort and indignity. So I labored on, following the bobbing green cap and driving white arms ahead of me, always out of reach . . .

She came up out of the water and stood with the wash playing about her toes, green-sheathed body and limbs marble white with cold, the slender streamline Aphrodite of our day, silhouetted against the brightness of the boardwalk lamps.

"You're slow," she said severely as I struggled up beside her, "and I'm freezing to death. I want a steak—a big, thick, juicy steak with mushrooms on it; and if you have anything in a flask, I want that too."

I had the flask; but though the flask and the steak removed our aquatic chill, they couldn't cheer us up. Except as mere routine nourishment, the dinner was a failure. I couldn't talk, for I had talked too much on the buoy. She was silent too, and I could guess why.

"When is the boat due?" I asked.

"Tuesday."

"Then I suppose this is my last chance to show you sights."

"Oh, you'll be busy," she said cryptically. What had I shown her, anyway? A roadhouse; a dance hall; a hole in the street. As an entertainer I had been unsuccessful, and I became continuously more unsuccessful as the dinner progressed toward the demi-tasse. Afterward, she refused to dance.

"No," she insisted sulkily, "we'd better go back to town. Sarah probably called out the Fire Department when I didn't turn up for dinner."

Before long, of course, Sarah would be superseded. I was so far sunk in the Slough of Despond that I had visions of even Sarah, after Hazel was

safely married, coming to lay her head on my shoulder and tell me the story of her life.

We drove back in dismal silence—caught, as usual, in a long unbroken column of townward-bound traffic that crawled, and spurted, and slowed down again with screeching brakes; and when we slowed the black column burst into sudden blossom, red blobs of stop lights flashing for an instant all along the line, to go out as we spurted forward once more. A garden of crimson roses blooming for a moment, then gone.

XXIX.

A Lady Spoiling for Trouble.

YET when we reached the garage, and Hazel had seen the car put to bed, she turned to me with an unexpected smile.

"It's early still, and Sarah was as mad as she could be hours ago. So let's go somewhere else . . . Oh, yes, I've been a pig all evening, and so have you. But the night is young. Show me a sight."

"What?" I asked ungraciously. "You'll see them all next week."

"Show me something Kenneth can't show me. Show me some gunmen. I'd like to see a shooting. Wouldn't you?"

"Inasmuch as I spent part of the morning in expectation of being shot, I wouldn't. Besides, our gunmen don't sit around waiting for customers. I don't know how to find any, except to go to some cigar store and wait till it's held up."

"All right. Then show me something else. Something exciting. Show me the East Side."

Some years had passed since I'd found the East Side exciting; but she'd never seen it, so there was hope. We went down on the elevated, struck off into a narrow side street, and came out in the district she'd heard about.

A jumble of swarming tenements, cut up by narrow streets littered with waste paper and decaying fruits—ill-smelling, noisy, steaming streets; fire escapes hung with clothes and bedding, till there seemed to be a long, ragged curtain along the walls on either side of us; windows jammed with half-dressed men and women talking to neighbors next door or across the way. Whole families, from grandparents down, clustering about the entrance of a tenement, laughing, chattering; old women guarding baby carriages at the curb, gossiping while they kept an eye on the little children tumbling about beneath the feet of passers-by; little girls skipping the rope in a circle somehow kept clear in the midst of the crowds; boys playing leapfrog in the streets; squalid, good-humored old people; flashily dressed, not overly clean young people; stifling heat, clattering voices, clamorous stench, and a compelling, joyous neighborliness.

Lines of pushcarts in the gutters, lit by lurid gasoline flares; groups of dapper, alert young men; parties of amazingly pretty girls, family groups, old people, slowly moving through the swarming streets, with the children always under foot; an occasional automobile pushing its honking way through the crowds; the tinkle of a bell opening a pathway for the donkey wagon full of dirty children, riding around the block for a cent; the dark blue of a policeman, gossiping with a knot of men in front of a restaurant, passing slowly down the street with a party of boys at his heels. The yellow-flaring entrances of movie theaters, alive with people pushing

in and out, or stopping to stare at the lithographs on which familiar faces appeared above legends in a strange alphabet; groups of girls surveying enviously the panel of photographs of movie stars. A continuous babel of chatter and laughter and hucksters' calls; the clack of Yiddish and English and Roumanian and Hungarian and Italian; the blare of motor horns, the tinkle of pushcart bells, the distant rumble of the elevated; and the shrill cries of the children as a continuous obbligato over the ceaseless murmur of the East Side.

For a long time she made no comment at all; then, rather awed, she murmured:

"Why, Alec, it's a foreign country, isn't it?"

"Maybe," I said. "But look at this news stand on the corner."

She looked. There were a score of papers in Yiddish, three or four in Russian, one or two in Roumanian; and a handful in English—movie fan magazines. From a second-floor apartment down the block came the strains of music.

"Let's stroll down," I proposed, "and listen to the quaint native folk songs."

But even from where we stood we could recognize the air that was being pounded out on a piano, and sung by a dozen voices—"Yes, We Have No Bananas."

"Look at the shops," I suggested. We stood in front of a men's clothing store; the suits in the window might have appeared—not on the Avenue, to be sure, but on Broadway—except that they were just a shade more full-fashioned, trimly waisted,

patch-pocketed. At the next window a flare of light illumined the rainbow colors of a lingerie shop that might have been on Broadway too, except that there was just a little more color, a little more of frills and laces.

"Down where the pink is a little pinker—that's where the East Side begins," said Hazel. "I take it all back, Alec. This is the United States. I don't know whether we're coming to it or it's coming to us; but here it is . . . And do you notice that the girls of my age are all well dressed—oh, the goods are cheap, and the styles are imitated, and all that; but you haven't seen the nine thousand cold stares I've got because I'm wearing a last year's model. They think I'm a poor idiot from the country; which I am."

A wave of ragged children swept past us just then and threw her against my shoulder.

"No, I don't mind it," she said when they had passed. "I love the way they let the children run the whole place. They seem to know how to take care of themselves, anyway."

"The survivors do," I suggested.

"It looks as if ninety per cent could be spared and still leave enough to carry on the race. Alec, I love this. It's alive. Of course, they must have a pretty hard time——"

"But they don't know it," I added. "And they're on the way up. Just for a contrast, I ought to show you the people who are on the way down. Our people. The much advertised middle class. The ones that are slipping down over the edge in-

stead of climbing up over it. You and I will never know what that's like—you because you're rich, I because I'm a teacher, with no hope of wealth and no danger of real poverty. But I am informed it wears the nerves—and yet they like the life.

“I wish I had time to take you around to see some of my friends. You'd never be knocked over by a regiment of children there. You'd see one at a time, or none. The people that know most about this town, that get most out of it—for they have to stay here eleven and a half months in the year—can't afford to pass on what they've learned to the next generation. They're here, and gone—but they stick. I don't know just why, but there's something about this town.”

She was silent for a moment, and when she spoke I saw she'd stopped listening some time back.

“I'm going to have six,” she said fiercely. “I can afford them.”

I said nothing. I'd heard other ladies threaten to have six, before they'd had any. Besides, whether six or two, they were Kenneth France's business, not mine.

So we prowled along, to come to a standstill presently, in the tight-jammed mob, in front of a doorway flanked by two great yellow lights. Above the door, a banner proclaimed in three colors and four languages that this was the night of the grand ball of the Jacob B. Katzkowsky Association, tickets for lady and gent fifty cents, including hat check. Between the lights the stairs mounted under a trellis-work hung with paper foliage, lit by red and blue

electric lamps; in the assembly room above, its windows crowded with young people, a Broadway melody was being afflicted with queer Oriental modulations.

"You wanted to dance," said Hazel. "All right—let's."

"We probably couldn't get in," I warned her. "We don't belong here, you see, and they're rather sensitive about intruders. If you want to dance, let's go uptown."

"I want to dance here," she insisted rebelliously. "Think they'll make trouble? All right; I like trouble."

I shoved a way through the crowd with Hazel clinging to my elbow, like Napoleon crossing the bridge at Lodi, and found that my fifty cents was as acceptable as any other.

This was all new to her, too; she lost step half a dozen times in our first dance, staring at the bare walls, the red-painted ceiling, the curtained stage at one end of the room, the long bar across one side with a row of iron tables in front of it, where lemonade and sarsaparilla were served as they were on Broadway; but—unlike Broadway—at lemonade and sarsaparilla prices. The hall was outrageously hot, and heavy with cheap perfume; but the only complaint she had to make was that the people looked just like anybody else.

We were at one of the iron tables a little later, sucking sarsaparilla through straws, when a thin little fellow with bright eyes came up to us and held out a gleeful hand.

"Why, hello, Dr. Deupree! Come down to look us over?"

For a moment I couldn't place him; then I recognized Leon Krimsky, who had been the star of my class in Cicero's essays two years ago. He was now, it seemed, a reporter on a Yiddish paper, and a moment's chat suggested that he would have been glad to give us guidance of the sort she wanted. But there was plainly something on his mind, and he drew me aside as soon as Hazel's attention was distracted by the dancers.

"I'd get the lady out of this if I was you. There might be trouble."

Hazel overheard, and demanded hopefully:

"What kind of trouble?"

"Well," Leon apologized, "there was a kind of a bad fellow named Frank Arany that used to live around here. He and his friends, they didn't get along much with Jake Kattkowsky and his friends, see; so finally Jake run him out and he went up to Harlem and turned gunman. And he was blowin' around that he would come down here and make some trouble, and we hear he was comin' to-night. We got a tip on the paper—that's why I'm here. I don't come to places like this except when there's a story, see. Well, Jake had the door watched, but this Frank and two of his friends got in somehow, by the fire escape maybe; that's them over there."

At a table in the corner sat three sullen, silent boys; and there was a ring of empty tables all around them. Many people were looking that way, and there was much whispering; but nobody spoke

to them. Near the door a stout, sweating young man—the great Kattkowsky himself—was in worried consultation with his vassals.

“It ain’t so good,” said Leon frankly, “because if Jake calls in the bulls he’s got no standing any more, and if he don’t call in the bulls—well, he’s good at takin’ care of the boys, but he ain’t no gunman. He’s sent down to the coffee house around the corner, though; and when the people he sent for get here, Frank will go out standing up or laying flat. So you better get the lady away.”

Hazel’s eyes were snapping.

“You don’t get me away,” she announced. “When a crime wave rolls right up and gets ready to break over my head, do you think I’d dodge it?”

“You think this is Los Angeles,” I said in exasperation.

“Alec, I’ve lived in Tonopah and Burkburnett and Los Angeles, and I never saw anybody shot at yet. And now that I’m in New York you wouldn’t take me away from the Wild West stuff, would you? Well, I don’t know whether you would, but you couldn’t.”

I gave her up; she was a strange woman. Leon had left us, vanishing in the crowd that was assembling near the door; but the music was beginning, and Hazel got up with the evident intention of going on with the dance. The floor was far from crowded; most of the crowd hugged the tables. But as it went on, and nothing happened, more and more couples came out on the floor.

Then there was a commotion at the top of the

stairway. A group of silent, determined young men, in type much like the strangers at the isolated table, pushed through the crowd and cut across the corner of the floor toward the silent three. Hazel and I, dancing along the farther wall, past the cool draft from a window, toward the corner, watched them in fascination. Somebody got up hastily, knocking over a table; then a single shot banged through the whining music, echoing back from ceiling and walls. The orchestra ended on a discordant screech; another shot, and the party broke up in a hubbub of screams and shouting, the clamor of overturned tables, the pounding of flying feet.

As the dancers streamed past us toward the doorway Hazel and I halted, clinging to each other. The fire escape window was out of reach, but just ahead of us was the corner of the wall. I fairly flung her into it, covering her with my body, pushing her back into the angle just as a bullet slapped the plaster above us. The fusillade of shots had drowned all other noises; I clutched her tense muscular shoulders and held her panting in the corner, my body shielding her as I looked into her startled eyes.

“No, no!” she cried. “Alec! Don’t!”

Shots banged behind us; she caught my shoulders and tried to pull me away, to pull me into the corner, behind her.

“Alec!”

Her elbows pressed against my chest; she wrenched frantically at my arms; but I held her

fast. Her fierce strength was helpless; I could have held her forever, to keep her safe.

“Alec! Please! You’ll be shot! Oh— Oh—”

“Stand still, you little fool!”

Her eyes blazed into mine with helpless, defiant rage; but full of something else that shone through the rage and defiance—a desperately frightened fondness, an agonized yearning——

My heart thumped louder than the pistol shots. We stared at each other in joyous, incredulous, frightened amazement; then I lifted her up and kissed her. The fingers that had gripped my shoulders pulled my head down to hers, and we clung together in the corner of the wall, both of us crying a little and laughing a little, her face buried in my shoulder, her body protected by mine.

XXX.

Natural Selection.

SOME time afterward Hazel raised her flushed face and smiled at me.

"Had you noticed that the battle's over?" she whispered.

Why, so it was. Wreaths of smoke drifted through a room three-quarters empty, and blue-coated policemen moved about in the crowd around the door, stilling the tumult with harsh, determined voices.

"We won't get mixed up in that," I told her. "You've been in the papers enough. Try the window."

It opened on a fire escape that went down into ill-smelling darkness. Hazel drew back.

"I don't like it, Alec."

"Quick!" I whispered as a policeman called something across the room. But she still held back.

"I dislike to pull any movie stuff," I observed, "but if you're going to be stubborn——"

With one arm about her waist and the other under her knees, I swept her off her feet and climbed out on the iron-barred platform. She stirred once, then lay surprisingly still as I carried her, no light load, down the narrow steps. The ladder let down from the lowest platform wasn't so easy, but she slipped

an arm about my neck and guided us with the other hand; we made it, and stepped off into the black courtyard below.

Then, hand in hand, we felt our way along the rear walls of darkened buildings, stumbling over garbage cans and broken boxes, expecting every instant the challenge of some nervous householder. But the attention of the district was all turned the other way; and we finally found a narrow passage between two buildings that let us out into the bright-lit street, where a tumultuous crowd was swirling back and forth, held back by a line of policemen, cleft open now and then for the passage of an ambulance or a patrol wagon, and always crowding, shoving, jamming.

Slowly I fought my way through, Hazel clinging to my coat tails. It was hard labor, as hard as a football game, but it served the useful purpose of keeping me too busy to think till suddenly we turned a corner and were out of the crowd, and out on the Bowery—the Bowery at midnight, silent but for the rumble of elevated trains overhead, dark but for street lamps, and the lighted window of a lunch counter down the block.

“Well!” said Hazel lightly. “So we did have an adventure after all.”

Again! That night up the river, she might have been excused for playing with me. But to-night she was playing with something more important than Alec Deupree. That moment in the corner had been more than an adventure, while it lasted . . .

Smiling, she swung herself up on an empty pack-

ing case in front of a darkened shop, and sat swinging her heels as she stared at me with flickering eyes.

"Say it," she suggested.

"It doesn't make much difference what you do to me," I said, "and maybe it doesn't make much difference what you do to yourself. But the next time you're in an adventurous mood you might think of the man you're going to marry."

"But that wasn't what I meant!" she protested. "If you won't say it, I'll say it. Alec, will you marry me?"

I stood before her trembling helplessly.

"My dear, I love you more than—more than—oh, more than whatever people love their girls more than—but——"

"But what? Are you afraid of my money? Because I can cook, and I can keep house, and if you won't take me any other way I'll give all my money away and live in your apartment on your salary. Only I think you'd be an awful simp——"

"I'm an awful simp," I granted, "but not that kind. A hundred million wouldn't make any difference, the way I feel about you. But you're only nineteen, and you've only known me a week; and maybe you've just had a brainstorm——"

"I've had a few brainstorms in the past," she said cheerfully, "but they weren't like this. Why, Alec, don't you think I *know*?"

Whereupon she tumbled off the packing case and into my arms, and she knew, and I knew, and a con-

siderable number of passers-by knew by the time we were able to lift our heads for a moment, to see them standing around us in an enthusiastic and growing crowd.

Of course we had to get out of that; there were no taxis in sight, so we struck across town hand in hand, silent once more. But a different kind of silence, this time; everything was all right. Presently I heard her laughing softly.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Why, I don’t know even yet if you’re going to marry me.”

“Why, didn’t I tell you about that?” I began; then I remembered a number of things, and stood still. “Of course—you’re engaged already——”

“Am I?”

“To Kenneth France.”

“Kenneth France? Dear me, I haven’t been engaged to him for a long time. Not since—whenever it was that we had dinner up the river. Night before last. I sent him a wireless when I got back to town.”

“You did?”

“Yes, of course I did . . . Alec, what’s the matter? You aren’t—you aren’t hopelessly tied up with that woman, are you?”

“That woman?”

“What’s her name—Lucile?”

“Don’t call her that woman,” I expostulated. “She’s——”

Her eyes stopped me. I’d never seen them look

like that before—tired and hurt and discouraged. Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide . . .

“I beg your pardon,” I said humbly. “If she’s that woman to you, she’s that woman to me.”

Her eyes flamed joyously.

“Then you really will marry me?” she asked. That time I left her in no doubt.

We finally got started walking again, having realized that we’d been embracing all over two or three assembly districts.

“But you’re so queer,” she explained. “And I suppose I am, too. I guess everybody’s queer. I didn’t really know I cared for you till that night up the river. And I thought you cared for me, and that when I told you I was engaged to Kenneth you’d simply knock over the table and grab me, and then everything would have been all right and we could have dumped Kenneth when we got around to it.”

“I wish I had,” I sighed. “It would have saved a lot of trouble.”

“But, my dear, you’re just not that way. I see it now. Oh, I didn’t see it then; I—I cried all night after I got home, and I didn’t want to come to your tea next day at all. I thought you wanted Mrs. Clevenger. And then down at the beach to-day I thought you must have got yourself all entangled with this other woman, and didn’t want to get untangled; and goodness knows what would have become of us both if we hadn’t run into this shooting this evening.”

"I've been a fool," I confessed.

"You've made me work pretty hard," she assented. "But I know how you felt. With all these women on your hands you got an inhibition, or a trauma, or one of those terrible things Freud writes about. I had to get you out of it. And I suppose I might as well be honest with you and admit that really I'm just like all other women; for I know you're too excited to believe it now, and I hope I'll be clever enough to keep you from ever thinking about it again."

"You wouldn't say that," I warned her, "if you'd seen as much as I've seen of other women."

"Well, don't think marriage means that you must give up your friendships," she said sweetly. "I want to meet your girl friends. I feel sure I shall love them all."

If her ancestor Eve had been anything like Hazel, that serpent would never have got started. She'd have had him eating grass, and liking it, miles away from the apple tree.

We went on through silent streets, lamplight falling in golden pools on the black asphalt between the black walls of deserted office buildings; across the long straight cleft of downtown Broadway, golden-lighted, but empty too. And then we came out on the corner of a park, its trees blurred in the haze of the June night; in the distance, a green bus rolled in dreamlike silence under a white arch.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Washington Square. Haven't you ever been here?"

"No."

"Then I can show you the Village."

She nodded dreamily.

"But not to-night. For think, Alec—we'll have so much time to—to show each other the town."

"Not too much," I said.

"I suppose not. For it's a different town, isn't it? Our town."

We climbed on a bus and rolled away up the long gold-lit lane of the Avenue. About us hung the golden haze that sometimes rises from the streets on summer nights, as if the air itself were radiant. Above, the dim masses of apartment houses, blue-gray in the haze, blocked off the faint pink reflection in the sky; clumps of lighted windows glowed high in air, a checker-board of blue and gold.

"You can't show this town to anybody who doesn't live here," I said presently. "You have to grow into it."

She nodded.

"Just as we'll grow into each other . . . Yet I think I'd be a little afraid of it, Alec, if I didn't have so much money. Would you, if we had to live on your salary, and didn't know whether we could ever get anywhere, or could afford to have children, or give them a decent chance if we had them? Or does the money kind of—take the edge off the excitement, for you?"

"Far from it," I assured her. "I can do without that kind of excitement. Of course I'd be afraid of New York if we had to live here on my salary. It isn't always like this, you know—soft grays and

blurry gold. Sometimes, when everything is hard and clear against a winter twilight, it chills you—but you love it just the same. We'd love it on my salary—only I'm glad we don't have to."

"I wonder if it will take the edge off," she mused, "to have what we want. I mean—when I came here I was all excited, because I felt that something big and wonderful and beautiful was sure to happen to me in this big and wonderful and beautiful town. And it did. I've got you. And I've always had money; so it seems I've got what most people want. And now that everything's happened, will the town lose its magic and look just like any other town?"

"No," I promised. "You can't exhaust this town. No matter how much you've got, there's always more to reach out for. We'll never know all about it, but it will be nice to try, together——"

Her hand squeezed mine.

"Alec, we'll show this town."

And I suppose at that moment Agnes was making the same vow, sitting among philanthropists and uplifters in her suite at the Ritz; and Lucile, dreaming on her chaste couch at the Martha Washington of her future in the cosmetic trade. It's a large town—all things to all men.

That was a magic evening, and the magic was still there when I telephoned next morning and felt my heart thump at the refreshing lazy tenderness of her greeting.

"Are you just up?" she asked. "Then you're

ahead of me. Sarah's still doctoring her throat, and I don't believe she'll get up this morning. No, I haven't told her anything that would give her a temperature. And so long as the coast is clear, you'd better come down and have breakfast with me. Will you?"

I found a table set for two in her big tapestried sitting room; perhaps it was only the morning sunlight, but I wondered why the place had ever looked gloomy. For she met me, smiling, in a lacy negligée, with the visibly insincere apology—

"I know this isn't a bit proper, but since it was only you——"

"That's what they all say," I was about to tell her; but I didn't. After all, the war was over.

After breakfast we sat down on a couch by the window, where we could look at the sunshine in the Park, and began to think of the impending and depressing routine of betrothal and marriage.

"I wish we could keep it a secret for a while," she confessed, "but if we did we'd lose a lot of time. I'll have to tell Sarah right away. That will mean a fight, but I can beat Sarah at the show-down. Anyway, we owe her something; if she hadn't taken such an awful dislike to you I might not have got interested in you—so soon. And I suppose you'll have to tell Mrs. Torrey."

"Another fight," I groaned. "Edith thinks it's a *mésalliance* for a Deupree to marry anybody, and after she'd given me such elaborate instructions about taking care of you——"

"Well, aren't you going to take care of me?"

Though if anybody in our household needs taking care of it's you. Now—I don't want to pry into your past, but is there anybody else you have to tell?"

"Only Lucile."

"Just what are you in for, with Lucile?"

"Well, I promised to help her find a place to live, and introduce her to people, and put up some money for her business if she can't find it anywhere else."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"Then I came along just in time," Hazel meditated. "Another week, and goodness knows where you'd have been. But we can settle all of that. As far as a place to live is concerned, I think the Martha Washington is ideal for her. And you and I and Mrs. Torrey can introduce her around, and I've got more money than I know what to do with, so I can finance her business."

"Do you think she'd take money from you?"

"I don't see why she shouldn't; and I know one thing—she'll never take any more from you. Please don't think I'm hard on her, Alec, or unsympathetic. I know she must be a dear little girl"—this from Hazel, who was only ten years younger—"and I do feel sorry for her. But——"

"But you have the right of way," I finished, with an eye on the slippered foot swung over her knee. My neck badly needed a foot like that.

But the sound of footsteps in the next room warned us that Sarah was awake and stirring.

"I don't think you'd better meet Sarah just now,"

Hazel advised. "Leave me to handle Sarah—you go and fix things up with Mrs. Torrey, and if she's any kind of a person she'll ask us to tea and give us her blessing. Run, now—here comes Sarah. No—please. Please, Alec—she mustn't catch us. Well, one more . . . There! Good-by."

She pushed me out into the corridor just as Sarah, in wrapped unkemptness, appeared at the door and raised protesting arms to high heaven. A respectable middle-aged couple on their way to the elevator stopped and gazed in horror at the spectacle of an excited young man thrust out by a pretty girl in negligée, while a gaunt and elderly female waved her arms and shouted invective. What a pity Agnes had missed that!

I ought to have told Edith at once, but when I was away from Hazel's inspiring presence the idea of facing the high priestess of the Deupree family cult and telling her that I was not only going to marry one of the daughters of men, but going to appropriate the very girl she'd particularly charged me to preserve for a suitable alliance—this was something that needed thinking over. I'd have to tell Edith some time; but at eleven o'clock I thought I'd do it at noon, and at noon I thought one o'clock would be better, and at one o'clock I decided that Edith would be in a more auspicious mood after lunch. So I called up Lucile.

The ankle was quite well now, it appeared, and Frank had called that morning.

"And, Alec," she rhapsodized, "he's so changed! I think he must have missed me after all. And

listen, Alec—he doesn't object at all to my starting into business; only he thinks it would be better to do it in Chicago. What do you think?"

"The idea is not unreasonable," I observed. "You already have a large and prosperous acquaintance in Chicago."

"Yes, that's true. Oh, and what do you think? Frank wants to put up the money for me. What do you think of that? Shall I let him, or would you rather——"

"I think you'd better let him. He has a good business sense, you know."

"And maybe it would look better, too. So you can tell those women you were speaking of—who were they? The ones you said might put up some money."

"Mrs. Torrey, and Hazel Deming."

"Who's Hazel Deming?" she asked. "You're always talking about Hazel Deming, and I never——"

"Why," I explained, "Hazel Deming is the girl I'm going to marry."

"Oh," said Lucile. "You didn't tell me. Well, I hope you'll be very, very happy. And you'll always be awfully good to her, won't you, Alec? I'm so sorry I didn't meet her at your tea that day; I could have told her—— But you'll come and see me and tell me all about her, won't you? And some night I want you to bring her to dinner with Frank and me."

"Frank and you?" I exploded. "You haven't got Frank at the Martha Washington?"

"Of course not. I'm joining him at the Biltmore this afternoon."

I couldn't help a gnawing curiosity as to whether she'd decided to do that before I told her about Hazel; but that was none of my business now.

At any rate, this cheered me up so much that after lunch I went down and called on Edith.

"Well, Alec, I'm glad to see you. I've been thinking about things you can do for me——"

"Edith, I'll be too busy this summer to do things for you. Hazel and I are going to be married."

"*What?* Hazel who?"

"Hazel Deming."

She stared at me in the obvious hope that it was merely paranoia.

"Why, you've hardly met her."

"We've met enough."

"But you don't know her."

"I'll never know her. But it's fun to try."

"But—but I left her in your care."

"Exactly. She's going to remain in my care, or vice versa."

By this time she was coming out of her stupor.

"Oh, Alec, how could you take advantage of an inexperienced child? And when I'd especially charged you—— Oh, it's infamous! You—of all men! With her money——"

"Now, Edith, if you mean to say that you're the only Deupree who has a right to marry money——"

She made a strategic withdrawal to previously prepared positions.

"Of course I didn't mean you were a fortune hunter. But I didn't suppose you were so cruelly short-sighted as to take advantage of a moment of emotional folly to change the whole channel of her life——"

"Who dug this channel? Not I—not Hazel. The sad truth, Edith, is that this affair is none of your business, and that you're sore because you know it's none of your business. If you'd happened to have this bright idea you'd think it was a good match."

"There's no use trying to talk to you in your present state of mind," she snapped, wandering about the room and pushing bells here and there. "I'm going to talk to Hazel. Silly child—I suppose the first time a man kissed her she lost her head." (Very likely this was true, but it was before my time.)

"And where was this woman—Mrs. Whitlow?" Edith demanded as maids began to come in like ambulances arriving at the scene of the explosion. "My coat and hat. Tell Jordan to bring the car around at once . . . Where was this woman, I say? I told you to get rid of her. I understand now why you didn't; she was complaisant to your amorous intrigues. Juliet's nurse . . . Well, I'll get rid of her. Come along!"

"Along where?"

"To the Plaza. I have a duty to you and a duty to Hazel; and I propose to do my duty, whether anybody else does or not."

Perhaps I should have done something. But I'd seen Edith like this before, and there was nothing to do but let her blow off steam.

"We were hoping you'd be nice about it," I suggested. "But if you're going to be difficult——"

"I shall not be difficult at all, Alec; merely just. And I certainly don't propose to fail in my duty out of misplaced tenderness. Come."

It was a silent trip; I knew that somebody's feelings were going to be hurt, and Edith, I suppose, was busy suppressing the qualms of misplaced tenderness. At any rate we were a sad-looking couple when we got to Hazel's apartment and found her shiningly but tremulously happy. She'd probably had a bad time with Sarah, I conjectured; and needing the moral support of some woman, she must have welcomed Edith as the ambassador of the public opinion that would bless our union.

Sarah—a visibly chastened Sarah, from whose grave voice the evidence of tonsillitis was missing—was in the background; Hazel stepped forward, and Edith caught her hands, kissed her on both cheeks, and in general behaved as one welcoming a bride-to-be into the family. And then, just as Hazel was beginning to smile, Edith drew back and said sadly:

"But of course, my poor child, this will never do."

"Why?"

"Why? My dear! Your youth—your inexperience—Alec's position—everything. He has every prospect of a brilliant career. He shouldn't marry for years; and when he does, he should marry an

older woman. You're quite unsuited for the position of a professor's wife——"

"Well," said Hazel meekly, "I've always heard that professors need money, and I've got that."

"Certainly. Wealth such as yours imposes obligations. You, too, may look forward to a position—a position of great influence, for which you must undergo a long apprenticeship. A position for which Alec is quite unsuited——"

"So neither of us is good enough for the other."

"Precisely!" said Edith. "Precisely. If your parents were living it wouldn't be my place to tell you this; but I know that young girls are apt to be impulsive and short-sighted, to want things that mature judgment recognizes as unwise——"

"Alec," Hazel interrupted, "has she told you all this? And what did you say to her?"

"Oh, I let her rave. I'm used to it."

"Well, I'm not going to let her rave," said Hazel fiercely, "and I don't propose to get used to it. Mrs. Torrey, because you knew father, and tried to be as nice to me as you knew how when I came to town, I thought I'd let you be a sort of general manager of this affair. You'd introduced us, and as long as you had no children of your own I thought you might like to have my wedding in your apartment, or your church. Goodness knows I'm like any other girl; I'd like orange blossoms and a veil and all the rest of it; and I was foolish enough to think that you might like to give us a—a benediction, and let people think you'd made the match. But if this is the way you feel about it—Alec, I can

pack a suitcase in ten minutes, and get the car in five more. And then we'll drive uptown so you can pack a suitcase, and then down to the City Hall; and if Sarah and Mrs. Torrey want to come down and see us married, all right, and if they don't, all right. What do you think of that?"

"I'm for it," I said briefly. Edith's face turned pale; she realized at last that her runaway slave was on free soil. My arm was around Hazel; Edith knew she could do nothing with us, and because she had to work off her feelings on somebody she turned to the silent Sarah.

"And what were you doing all this time, I'd like to know?"

"Don't blame it on Sarah," Hazel laughed. "She did her best to head it off—only as luck would have it she got sick just in time."

"Sick?" Edith declaimed. "What right had she to be sick?"

"Oh, be gentle," Hazel implored. "I've just given her an awful raking, haven't I, Sarah?"

"Yes," said the dragon woman, "and I stood it, as I'd stand no more from Ella Deming's child. But I won't take anything from you, Mis' Torrey. I'm goin' to say a few things here and now that you'll remember, and then I'm goin' to pack up and go back to California. I own a little property myself that oil's been struck on; I don't have to work for nobody.

"Yes, I tried to keep Hazel from seein' this young man; I told her he was a fortune-hunter; I said he

didn't look to me like he was any better than he ought to be. And I done it all with a purpose.

"I promised Ella Deming on her dyin' bed, 'Sarah,' she says to me, 'I want that you should look after my baby. I want you to see she marries some good man that would make her happy.' This was before anybody supposed there'd ever be money in the family, but I reckon I'd 'a' promised anyway. We was always right good friends, me an' Mis' Deming.

"Well, eventually Hazel and I come on to this city, where they run at you with taxicabs all the time, and have crime waves, and break the law, and all that, and so far as I can see an innocent girl ain't got much chance. I saw I'd have to keep my eyes open; and then this young man come along, and I thought to myself, well, now, Ella Deming would think right well of him. He's got a good face, and anybody can see he's been raised right.

"But I knowed the child pretty well. The best way to make her want anything is to tell her she oughtn't to have it. So I begun warnin' her against this young man, tellin' her to keep away from him. She's had many a laugh, she has, thinkin' how she was gettin' around me; for of course when I warned her off she set her mind on it.

"When they'd seen each other a few times, I thought I'd better let them do the rest. So yesterday when I saw her all fidgety and nervous, and wantin' to get out somewhere that she wouldn't tell me about, I pretended I had the quinsy and let her

get out and go to him; and they flopped right into each other's arms. I hope they stay there; I think they're a right good-lookin' couple.

"The good Lord knows, Mis' Torrey, I ain't one to fly in the face of Nature. When these two young things at the matin' age turn right to each other as natural as they have, it'll take somebody with more gall than you've got to keep 'em apart, an' somebody with less sense than me. An' now I've done my duty by Ella Deming, I'm goin' to leave this wicked city an' go back to California and buy me a little ranch; and I hope they'll come to visit me, and bring the children."

In the ponderous silence that followed these remarks I became aware that Hazel and I were clutching each other with a vigor perhaps unwarranted in a couple brought together by such subtle strategy. Sarah, who alone of all women had flattered me by regarding me as bold and bad, had let me down. I was unmasked before the girl who ought to look on me as romantic and dangerous; unmasked in hopeless respectability. Nobody ever thought of me in that way.

"Do you still like me?" I asked nervously.

Before the eyes of Edith and Sarah she pulled my face down to hers.

"I love you," she whispered. "You old devil!"

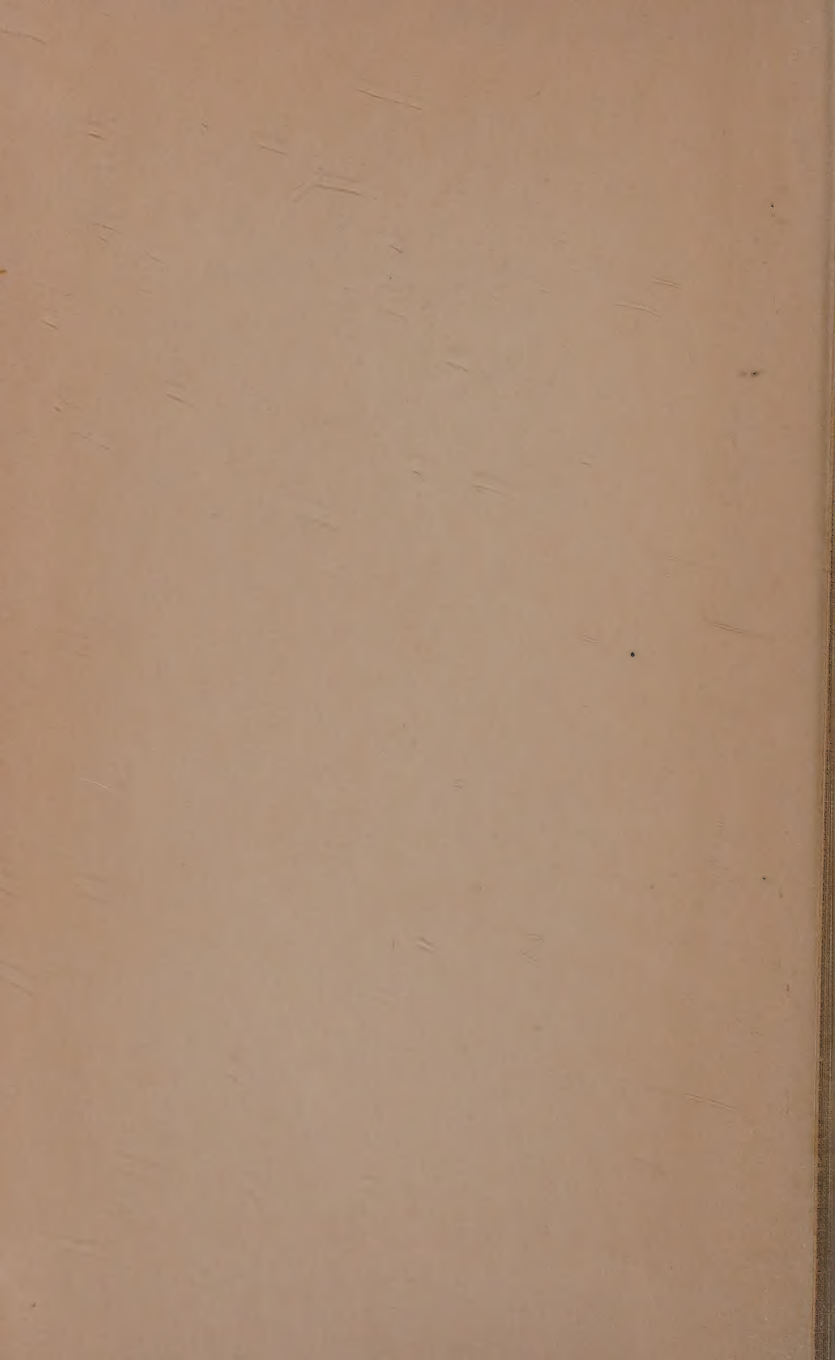
"But you foolish children," Edith wailed in final protest, "what are you going to do? Where are you going to live? What are you going to do with all that money?"

"What are we going to do?" said Hazel. "Get

married, and you and Sarah can still come down and see us, if you want to. Where are we going to live? Well, we can prowl around in the car for a little honeymoon; and then we're going to come back, and live in Alec's apartment this summer. I'll cook and take care of it, and make him write his book . . . Oh, yes, Mrs. Torrey. He's going to write his book . . . And about the money—well, I'd meant to endow Sarah, but it seems she doesn't need it. But I guess we'll find something to do with the money. There's always the income tax; and I was just thinking a while ago—— What was it you wanted for your college, Alec? A women's dormitory, and a memorial gateway, and half a million for the endowment fund——"

THE END

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